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OR,

The Gamin Detective's Double Snap at Santa Fe.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

WHO FIRED THE SHOT.

"SWEET pertaters!"

"What's the trouble with ye this time?"

"I don't know about it, Skinny, an' that's the fact."

"Why don't ye know about it? Ain't ye goin' to see what he wants?"

"Oh, bet yer life I'm goin', Skinny; my concern is all on your account. I don't know about takin' you with me."

THE DISGUISED BILLY HAD PAUSED AND SMILED TO SEE THAT SKINNY'S MAKE UP
HAD STOOD THE TEST.

"Ye don't, hey? Well, if that is all that troubles you, Billy, I can set ye straight in short order. You are goin' ter take me with yer, which is ter say, I'm goin'."

Broadway Billy had a half-comical, half-troubled look upon his face, and read over once more a note which he held in his hand. He and his lean lieutenant were at their hotel in Santa Fe. It was some days after their adventures as narrated in the last preceding story, and they were as good as new and ripe for further exploits.

"Ye see, it is like this," Billy said, thoughtfully: "The gentleman says he wants to see us, an' that's where the diffikilty will be. He can see me all right, no question about that, but when he comes ter look fer you—"

"Now you shut right up, Billy!" Skinny cried. "If ye don't, I'll kick a lung out of ye." And he made a charge upon his more weighty partner.

Billy laughed, and dodged around to the other side of the table near which they happened to be.

"Well, ain't it so?" he demanded. "Ain't you so thin that he'll have ter be sharp-sighted ter see ye?"

"If I can't be seen," was Skinny's retort, "I can make myself heard, an' that will answer jest as well. Anyhow, I'm goin', an' that settles it."

"All right, Shadder, I'll take your word for it. But I must insist on tyin' a string to ye afore I take ye out. You will notice that the wind is blowin' some, and a gentle zephyr might waft ye away."

"Oh! shut up with your nonsense. You make me weary. But say, read that note over again, will ye? I want ter fix it better in my mind. Who is this Cleverdale Finck? Is he anybody you know? Seems ter know your handle well enough."

"That's ther proper question, Skinny, and quite properly put. Hang me for a dried onion, though, if I can Finck who he is— Hold on, don't faint; I won't do it again. That was a pretty far reach to fetch a poor pun, I admit. But open yer ears, my gay an' festive atom, and here's the wording of the 'pistle.'"

With that Billy read aloud as follows:

"To Mr. WM. WESTON:—

"Will you and your partner come to my office soon as convenient? Your landlord can tell you who I am and where to find me. Do not consult any one else about it. It is important, and I hope you will not disappoint me. I will add that it concerns detective work. I want to see you.

"Very truly yours,

"CLEVERDALE FINCK."

"Go!" Billy cried, as he folded the note and put it in his pocket; "we'll go, Skinny, if it costs a leg. When you mention detective work, Broadway William is right on deck, every time. Partner, we'll amble right out and find this Clever-what's-his-name, and ferret out a peddy-gree for him clear back to Adam, before sundown. What do ye say?"

"I s'pose there's no use sayin' anything. If you have made up your mind to go, why, go you will, spite of guns and spiter, too. I only hope there's no danger in it for us, for I have got nervous of late about you. You are so darin' that ye don't stop at nothin', and some of these fine days you are goin' ter git dosed and planted, and that will be the last of ye; see if 't ain't."

"Croakin' again, are ye? Why, Skinny, I'm 'shamed of ye. I'm not goin' to scold ye, nor yet spank ye—as I feel I'd ought to do, but I'm goin' to let ye know that I'm really and truly 'shamed of ye. A feller can't die but wunst in the nat'ral order of things, kin he? And what's the difference whether it comes a few days sooner or later? In my case, though, I've been disposed of so often that I've got hardened to it. You wouldn't mind it, I know, if there was more of ye: but as it is you can't help it. Now if you had more heft—"

"Oh! shut up and say no more about it," Skinny cried. "When you set that mill of yours runnin', you never know when to stop. If we're goin' to see this Clever-and-the-rest-of-it fellow, let's be about it."

"Skinny, my attenuated molecule, it is bad manners ter interrupt yer elders, ter say nothin' of superiors, when they're talkin'. Bear it in mind, as in the case in point, ter wit. I'll forgive ye this time, seein' you look so sorry, but be more careful hereafter. Since you mention it, mebbey it would be as well to be movin'. Come along, my gay an' festive trifle-of-nothin'-in-particular."

Seeing that Skinny was getting a little provoked, Billy gave him a playful poke and dodged out of the room, and Skinny followed.

Going down, they entered the bar-room of their temporary place of abode, and Billy accosted the landlord.

"Who is Mr. Cleverdale Finck, landlord?"

"Cleverdale Finck? Why, he's our pop'lar young insurance agent."

"Insurance agent, hey?"

"Exactly. But, what do you want with him?"

"I'll s'plain that presently," Billy answered.

"Where is his office?"

The information was correctly given, and Billy made a mental note of it as he was told.

"Yer see, landlord," he then proceeded to explain, "I've made up my mind that I have got to have my frail follower here insured. Only last night I missed him, after we'd gone to bed, and I had to get up and shake the sheet to find him. It is too wearin' on my nerves, and I can't stand it. Now if it—"

"Shut up!" cried Skinny, picking up a chair and drawing back with it as if ready to strike, "or I'll— There, I was goin' ter say I'd brain ye, but it would be a hard matter to draw blood from a turnip, much less to find brains in a head of cabbage."

This raised a laugh against Billy.

"There, see how he takes on!" said Billy, with an injured air. "When I am usin' my best endeavors in his behalf, this is the thanks I get for it. Ain't it 'most enough ter make a stone image shed tears? If he could only realize th' fatherly feelin' I have fer him, I'm sure he wouldn't do so. But it's no use feedin' swine to pearls, as the old sayin' is, an' I guess—"

Skinny had dropped the chair, and stepping up to Billy, was now going through the motion of turning a crank, as of a barrel organ.

No telling to what lengths they might have gone, but, about the time Billy cut short in what he was saying, and took a small magnifying glass from his pocket to look at Skinny through it, a pistol shot startled everybody in the room.

Instantly the lads dropped their foolishness, and were keenly on the alert to learn who had fired the shot and what the effect had been.

Immediately a young man staggered into the room, his face pale and his hand clasped to his side.

Broadway Billy sprang to the door quickly and looked out, but no one was in sight upon whom he could fasten suspicion. No one was on the piazza, and no one on the street was immediately near. It was a mystery who had fired the shot.

"I—I—I'm shot!" the young man had gasped, and that was all. He fell forward upon his face with the words, and when they picked him up he was dead. It was a thrilling event for that staid and orderly town, and the excitement was great.

"Heavens!" gasped the landlord, "it is Harry Rentaway!"

"And who is he?" inquired Billy.

"One of the squarest young fellows in this town."

"And who d'ye suppose killed him? Have any enemy that you know of?"

"Nary a one, that I could name. But, this is no time to answer questions on the matter."

The half-dozen men in the room had lifted the body and laid it upon a table, and expressions of the greatest sympathy were heard from all.

"This is awful!" the landlord gasped, wiping the dampness from his own forehead. "I never imagined what a shock it would give a feller to see a murder done."

"But you didn't see it done," reminded Billy. "The person who did the deed has got off, and it may be a hard job to find him, or her; for it's just as likely to be a she as a he."

"Chance for you to prove what you are good for," hinted one. "You have got your name up here as a first-class detective."

"And it may be a case that would puzzle an older head than mine," Billy made response.

"But you kin bet that Billy will solve it if anybody does," boasted Skinny.

It was remarkable how soon a crowd filled the bar-room, and how quickly the news spread.

In less than ten minutes the room was filled, and within half an hour, it seemed, the whole city knew of the crime.

But, the wider the news spread, the deeper the mystery seemed to grow. No one could offer any guess as to who could have done the awful deed, and suspicion seemed unable to fasten anywhere.

For the time Billy and Skinny forgot all about their summons to the office of Mr. Cleverdale Finck, and lent all their attention to this matter, gathering up every bit of information that came to their ears. As usual, Billy was keenly

alive to the case, and his detective "fever" was raging.

Harry Rentaway, the lads learned, had been the only son, in fact the only child, of Barrington Rentaway, a retired army officer of means, who had settled at Santa Fe upon retiring from the service.

He had married a Mexican belle, and Harry had been their only offspring. The father was living, though his wife had been dead some years. Barrington and Harry had been close companions, and it had often been remarked that they were more like brothers than like father and son.

Barrington was at Fort Marcy when the tragic event took place, where he was in the habit of going frequently, finding it hard to break away from his old life; and when the news came to him, it was said that the shock almost killed him. Certain it was that when he reached the hotel, those who knew him declared he had aged ten years.

His grief, when he beheld the body of his son, was something terrible to witness. And as soon as the first force of it had been spent, he swore that the murderer should forfeit his life in penalty, if he had to devote his remaining years and his last dollar to that end. And, furthermore, he then and there proclaimed a reward of five thousand dollars for information that would lead to his detection and arrest.

Billy and Skinny had remained in the bar-room, and were witnesses to this as to everything else that took place.

Something had been said about a certain Miss Wesselley, and Billy had inferred that she must have been engaged to the murdered man.

Another name, too, that of one Harrison Waldmar, had been mentioned in connection, and Billy inferred that he had been either a rival of the dead Harry, or a very intimate friend. He could not decide which.

The conversation had been in low tones, fragmentary, and none too clear at best, and Billy had not been able to arrive at the true state of affairs. He stored the names in mind, however, intending to question the landlord when the excitement abated.

CHAPTER II.

A QUICK ARREST MADE.

WHEN finally the body of the young man had been removed from the hotel, and comparative order had been restored, Broadway Billy sought to pick up further information by putting some inquiries to his host.

Skinny was as intent as Billy, too. Their young blood had been fired with the desire to hunt down the cowardly assassin and bring him to account for his dastardly crime. And that was what Billy had quietly resolved he would do, if it lay in his power.

Choosing his time to suit the landlord's mood, Billy approached him and offered the remark:

"That was a nasty piece of business," with a shrug of the shoulders to express something of the horror he had seen the landlord exhibit.

"I should remark that it was," was the ready assent. "And Harry was such a fine fellow, too. It's a pity, and I only hope they'll find out who did it, that's all. I don't want to see the cuss get away. I'd like to know who it was."

"So would I," echoed the New York lad. "Are you willing to talk about it now? You choked me off before, and I waited till I thought you looked lonesome for somebody to talk to."

"Oh, yes, I'm willin' enough to talk about it," was the response. "I was too much worked up to have much to say then."

"I could see that you didn't want to be bothered, so I closed my trap and waited. Now there's some questions I'd like to ask, and not out of idle curiosity, either."

"I can believe that, seein' the name you've got as a detective."

"No matter about that. By the way it looks, there's nobody that can be suspected of this crime."

"It most certainly does look that way. Somebody done it, of course, but who it was is more than I can imagine. I didn't think Harry had an enemy in the world. I don't believe he had, either."

"Then why was he killed?"

"That's where you've got me."

"Let's take a glance at the circumstances," Billy observed. "Here it is broad daylight, and that shot was fired out there on the piazza or on the street in front of the house, as we know by the direction of the report we heard, and by the fact that the man staggered in from the piazza and fell on the floor."

"Yes, there's no gettin' around them points."

"Well, I looked out right away, or as soon as

I could get to the door, but nobody was in sight who looked suspicious. No one was on the piazza, and nobody was very near anyhow. The one who fired the shot must have dodged around the house, there at the right side, and I'm sorry now that I didn't run out to that end of the piazza. But I would have been too late, of course."

"No doubt about it. The one who fired that shot dodged quick, you may bet on that."

"And it seems strange that no one in the street turned this way. But then the report was not so very loud, though it must have been heard. Still they may have given a glance, and seeing no excitement, gone right on about their business. One thing is plain, and that is that it was murder, cool and deliberate; and the murderer took the most favorable chance that offered. All this is guessing at it though; what we are after are facts—points."

"Right you are in that, my lad," the landlord agreed. "Supposings won't hang the rascal, let alone find him for the hanging."

"Well, let's stop guessin' and begin to fish for facts. Now, there's one or two points that I'd like to have more light on. Will you hold your candle my way?"

The landlord smiled.

"I'll lighten you all I can," he assured.

"Well, then, to begin at the front end of the puzzle, who is this lady they spoke of as Miss Wesselley?"

"She's one of the belles of Santa Fe, and one of the finest girls you ever saw. Harry was payin' attention to her."

"I thought so. Were they engaged, d'ye know?"

"I don't know; hadn't any means to find out. Mebbe they was."

"Don't matter in p'tic'lar, anyhow, so long as they was sweet on each other. That's the pint, you know."

Billy was dropping into his free-and-easy every-day manner of speech, which was so natural to him, and in which he was a master artist.

"No, I don't reckon it does," the landlord coincided.

"And then there's a Harrison Waldmar I heard mentioned while the crowd was here. Who is he?"

"Why, he is a chum of Harry's, or leastways he was sich—I mean that they were pards, and the best sort o' pards, up to some weeks ago, when they had a falling out."

"There! that is what I was tryin' to get at. I couldn't make out whether they was good friends or what. How did they happen to fall out? Do you know all about their diffikilty?"

"Oh, yes, everybody knows about it. You see, they both was hit with the same club at the same time—that is to say, both got in love with Cora Wesselley at once, and when that is the case, you know, feelin's can't be pleasant."

"Sweet pertaters! I should say not! I remember when I fell in love with Molly McGee, and a red-headed young—"

"You'd better stick ter facts," interrupted Skinny. "What has that got ter do with this case?"

"Bless me!" Billy snorted, looking at his lean partner in pretended surprise, "you are there, ain't you? I didn't see you, as you're standin' in th' shadow of the light— Study that when you have time. Mebbe you're right, little one, so we'll take a fresh start."

With that Billy turned again to the landlord.

"You don't imagine this man Waldmar is the one who did the thing, do you?" he questioned.

"Great stars! no!" earnestly. "Waldmar is as fine a fellow as Harry was. No, that's impossible."

"I hope so, for his sake, but rivals in love sometimes do crazy things that they wouldn't think of doin' at any other time. Now that red-headed— That's so, Skin, I wasn't to drift off to that. Who is this Waldmar, landlord?"

"He's all I've said of him. Besides that, he's a son of of a rich father, and the family is a respectable one all around. No, it don't seem possible that he would do sich a thing as kill a man, and most least of all Harry Rentaway. I couldn't believe that of him."

"No, sir!" exclaimed others in the room, who were listening, "you needn't look there for your man."

"They mebbe didn't feel right to'rds each other," another speaker put in, "an' we can't s'pose they did; but they wouldn't come to shootin'."

"Then I s'pose there's no use lookin' to him," remarked Billy.

"Not a bit o' use," the landlord assured.

Just then two or three men entered the bar-

room in excited haste, and one of them exclaimed:

"Have you heard the latest?"

"No," was the more than prompt answer.

"Harrison Waldmar has been 'rested."

"What! Harrison Waldmar 'rested?"

"That's what's happened. They think he's th' one done it."

"I'll never believe it!" protested the landlord.

"I'd 'most as soon think Harry's father done it."

Billy and Skinny were all attention.

"But how did he ever come ter be s'pected?" was asked.

"It is knowed they had a quarrel t'other night."

"What of that? Must every quarrel lead to murder?"

"No; but there's murder here, and a quarrel is not goin' to be overlooked. When that was made known, his arrest was ordered."

"An' that ain't th' wu'st of it, either," averred another of the new-comers.

"What's th' rest of it then?"

"One chamber of his revolver was found empty."

"Whew!" the landlord whistled, drawing a long face.

"No, nor that ain't th' hull of ther wu'st of it," another struck in.

"Well, let's have it all in a lump," was the eager cry. "Give us th' hull piece ter chew on."

"Why, some fellers seen him hurryin' away from this direction after ther shot had been fired, near as anybody kin tell, an' he looked excited. And his pistol was smoke-white on th' nose when it was looked at, after they'd nabbed him."

"Where was he when arrested?" asked Billy.

"Home," was answered.

"And he went straight home from this direction?"

"So it seems."

"How long had he been there?"

"See here, I don't know every p'int about it," was the retort.

"No matter; I merely asked."

For some minutes then there was a general rattle of question, answer and surmise.

It seemed that Harrison Waldmar had been arrested, as shown, and under the circumstances mentioned. He would say nothing, except to declare most positively that he was innocent of the crime. In fact, according to his own words, he had not known of it till his arrest.

The men who had been sent for him, it was further mentioned, had stated that the young man had almost fainted with fright when they made known their errand, showing every evidence of guilt. Waldmar, in his own behalf, said it was caused by the shock it gave him to hear that Harry Rentaway had been killed by an assassin's bullet.

But beyond, that nothing had yet been cleared up. Waldmar would not explain about the empty chamber in his revolver, nor would he say where he had been when seen moving toward home in haste about the time the crime was done. Altogether it looked dark for him, and gradually public opinion went against him. And the more so since it had come out that he had used threats at the time of his quarrel with the murdered man.

All this, and a good deal more of minor importance, did Billy and Skinny get hold of, and when the New York lad, after awhile, asked the landlord what he thought about it, the man shook his head. He wouldn't have believed it, he couldn't have believed it, he declared, if the proof wasn't so strong. And it certainly did look as though the right man was in the toils for the cowardly crime.

CHAPTER III.

BILLY'S OPINION WANTED.

BILLY and Skinny presently left the hotel and walked down the street.

Their minds were busy with this new problem that had been thrust upon their notice.

Eager were they both to solve this mystery, to bring the cowardly assassin to account, and win further renown for themselves.

Skinny had the "fever" now almost as bad as Billy, though he did not like to admit that such was the case. He wanted Billy to be responsible for everything in this line.

Perhaps this was with a wise foresight to a possible failure, when he, Skinny, could have ample room to fall gracefully, as it were, and put the blame of everything upon his partner. If successful, he would come in for a share of the glory.

There was nothing slow about Skinny.

"Well, my gay an' festive siver," spoke Billy, "what do you think of this case? Do you think this Harrison Waldmar is guilty?"

"I'll be twisted if I know what to think about it," was Skinny's response to that. "It seems to look bad for him, and folks seems to think it must be so. What do you think?"

"I'm like you. I don't know jest what ter think. But it is wonderful easy for folks to be mistaken once in a while, and I have an idee that folks may be mistaken this time. Some-thin' seems to tell me that he didn't do it at all. It is for you and me to find out."

"Yes, and maybe it will be for you and me to get ourselves into trouble if we go to poking our noses into it too far. But there's no use talking to you, as I have found out by a dear experience. And I suppose you will drag me into it with you, and I'll have to share the dangers in order to lend you my protecting care. Go ahead, and good luck attend you."

"Sweet pertaters!" exclaimed, Billy "but that's quite an able address fer you to make, Skin. Don't you feel tired after it? I'll bet if you'd own up, that you're as anxious to get at the bottom of this thing as I am. Never mind, I'm going into it anyhow, boots and all, and if I don't stir things up it will be because I have forgot how. I want to see this Harrison Waldmar, if it's possible, and have a talk with him if he's willing."

"That will be the best thing we—I mean you—can do. Then you will know what sort of fellow he is."

"Exactly, my little trifle. And then we—excuse me—I will know where to take hold."

Appearances against him are ugly enough just now, Billy."

"I admit it; but we'll see what's what."

"Well, where are you going now?"

"I guess we had better call on this Clever-and-the-rest-of-it fellow, and see where his pain lies."

"That's so; I had almost forgotten about him. We better go there and see what he wants, and tell him we can't bother with his case now."

"We?" interrogated Billy. "I thought it was I."

"Oh! you know what I mean, anyhow."

"Yes; I know you're mean enough for anything. As to giving up his case, if it is a case, we'll see about that. If it ain't too heavy for us to carry, I guess we will take it aboard."

Skinny protested vigorously, and their talk rattled on as they proceeded to the office of Mr. Finck.

Following the direction of their landlord, they were presently at their destination.

At the side of the door of a rather respectable looking building, was a sign indicating that "Cleverdale Finck, Insurance" occupied a room on the second floor.

The lads went in and up-stairs, and at the first door on their right, at the top, the sign was repeated.

Billy opened the door, and they walked boldly in and looked around.

A good-looking and well-dressed young man was at a desk near a window, and at the other window sat a thin, wrinkled man of age uncertain.

"Ah! my lads, glad to see you!" the young man exclaimed, getting up and offering his hand to Billy. "I know you, of course; everybody in Santa Fe knows you. Take chairs."

"We might have been here a little sooner," responded Billy, "but that awful affair at the hotel kicked up such an excitement that we couldn't get away from it. I will introduce my partner, Mr. Skinny. He is little but exceedingly good."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Skinny. I knew you by sight, of course. And now— But, my humble apology to you, Mr. Ferret," turning to the other man. "Let me introduce these young gentlemen to you. This is Mr. Weston, popularly called Broadway Billy; and this other is Mr. Skinny, his partner. Young gentlemen, Mr. Ferret."

These introductions were made with all the airs of a French dancing master, and Billy took a dislike to Mr. Finck from that moment.

There was something about him too airish to suit Billy's sense of the fitness of things.

So honestly blunt and hearty himself, he hated anything that savored of affectation in others. In his mind he set Mr. Finck down for a dude.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance," acknowledged Mr. Ferret, rising and extending his hand. "I have heard of you since my arrival here, Mr. Weston, and have had a curiosity to see you."

"Good enough," returned the Gotham Gamin, "but I can't say whether I'm glad to make your acquaintance yet or not. Shall have to reserve my decision till we are better acquainted, if that is destined to be. If it isn't, no matter."

At this Mr. Ferret laughed a dry little laugh that was like a cackle.

"I admire your frank manner, anyhow," he declared. "I hope that we shall know more of each other, and that your opinion of me will ripen into a good one."

"It will depend entirely on you, if it does or does not," decided Billy.

"Of course you are here in response to my note," observed Mr. Finck. "You have said as much, so the question is idle. Let us now to business."

"Yes, let's get the cat by the tail at once. Are we to talk the business before Mr. Ferret?"

"Most assuredly. It was to have you consult with him that I invited you here. Mr. Ferret is a detective, in the employ of the Equivalent Insurance Company. He is here working up an important case."

Broadway Billy looked at Mr. Ferret with a new interest.

That gentleman smiled, his face puckering itself into a succession of wrinkles.

"So, that's the how of it, eh?" Billy remarked. "Well, if that's the case, I guess I had better make my little bow and retire. I don't care to set myself up as the peer to a professional."

"Let me say a word about that," spoke Mr. Ferret. "I am a professional, it is true. You may have heard of me. My name is Alexander Keene Ferret, in full; which I abbreviate to A. Keene Ferret. Quite an appropriate name for one in our line, eh?"

"A. Keene Ferret ought to be a good one," Billy acknowledged. "If name counts for anything, you ought to get there every time, Mr. Ferret."

"And I 'most always do, too," was the return. "Just now, however, I seem to have a case that puzzles me."

"It is of little use for me to have anything to do with it then," Billy modestly observed.

"We will see about that later. We want to consult with you about it, anyhow."

"Well, then, let 'er slide!" and leaning back in his chair and crossing his legs, Billy was ready to hear whatever was coming.

"You may state the case if you please, Mr. Finck," said the detective, giving the young man that part in the matter in hand.

"Very well, if you say so." And then turning to Billy and putting on a serious air, the agent went on:

"I mentioned you to Mr. Ferret, and it was at his request that you were called here. We want to give the facts of the case to you, and see what you think of it. We know by the reputation you enjoy that you have had experience, and that your opinion will be worth something."

"Say," interrupted Billy, "let all that rest, if you please, and get down to the particulars of the case."

"Right, there!" put in Skinny. "All his greatness lies at the end of his tongue, Mr. Finck."

"You keep quiet," ordered Billy, "or I'll fold you up and put you in my pocket."

"Well, then, for the case: A little less than a year ago an old gentleman came to me seeking insurance on his life. He was a man about seventy years of age. His name was Hiram Lodgelaw, and he was a well-known and respected citizen of this place."

"His age was against him, of course, but he passed examination all right, and took out a policy for a large amount, making it payable to his young wife. He came to us of his own accord, and so far as I have been able to find out, without consulting anybody about it. His widow declares that she knew nothing about it until it was all done, when he put the policy into her hands."

"His was a rather peculiar case. He was well-to-do, but his income was his only during life; he could not dispose of it by will. At his death it went to another part of the Lodgelaw family. Knowing this, and wanting to provide for his widow, as he explained it, he considered life insurance his best and only means of attaining the desired end. Accordingly, as I said, he was insured, and for as large an amount as the company would allow."

"He paid his premium, and everything rested quietly until about seven weeks ago, when he suddenly died. The doctors attributed his death to a natural cause, after careful examination, and he was buried. I had been promptly notified, and forwarded the facts of the matter to headquarters. I have no personal opinion to express, one way or the other, though if my opinion were demanded it would have to be that I can see nothing crooked about the affair. Mr. Lodgelaw was too well known to admit of his

being concerned in any fraud. He was simply insured, all in good faith so far as any one knew, and now he is dead."

"The insurance company, however, is not satisfied with the case, and the matter is under official investigation. Mr. Ferret has been sent here to look into it, but there seems to be nothing to look into. It seems to be a plain and honest deal, all round, and public opinion is that the widow ought to have the money. On my own part, being the agent of the company, I have nothing to say. If there has been any crooked business anywhere, I want it hunted out and the thing exposed. I don't want the company to be swindled. On the other hand, if it is all straight, then I think the woman ought to be paid. That is the case, and with it you have my opinion after all. Now what do you think of it?"

"There don't seem to be any case about it. If that is the situation, and Mr. Ferret can't alter it, I guess the company will have to come down with the money," was Billy's promptly expressed opinion.

"That is the way it looks," confessed the insurance detective. "But, Mr. Weston, if you had been sent here, as I have been, what would be your move? Let's see how near alike we think."

"What would be my move? Why, I'd go into the thing and plow it up from 'way back, and I'd settle it in my own mind one way or the other, and call it done."

CHAPTER IV.

BILLY'S BIT OF ADVICE.

The detective looked at Billy keenly, smiling. "That is the very thing I am trying to do," he admitted.

"Well, then, why don't you do it?" demanded Billy. "The field is open."

"I know it is; but there is such a thing as making a beginning on a case you take up."

"Well, if you haven't made a beginning you are wasting time," was Billy's comment on that.

"You had better begin."

"What I am driving at," the detective made plain, "is to ask you where you would make your beginning, if you were in my place. You have all the facts of the case, and know as much about it as I do."

"Say, do you want me to do your work for you?" Billy asked.

"I would pay for your help, if you could lend me any assistance in it," was the answer.

"Which I don't believe I can," Billy declared.

"If you want me to take the case and tackle it for you, I'll do that, with Skinny's help."

"I think we've got about all we can handle now," protested Skinny.

"Why, what else are you working at?" asked the detective.

"This Rentaway murder," answered Skinny.

"Now, Shadowy, you're telling tales out of school," Billy admonished. "You shouldn't do that."

"So, you intend to try your hand at that affair, eh?" spoke the detective in something of admiration. "If that is so, no use looking for any assistance from you in this matter."

"There is something there to work on," said Billy. "You don't seem to know whether you have got a case or not. I guess I'll stick to the one I have got in tow; but if you want me to lend you a hand, when you get started, why, just call on me. If I can't come myself I'll send Skinny."

"Well, I will do that," the detective agreed. "I am glad I have met you, although calling you here has amounted to little result."

"And we'll be going," returned Billy. "You wanted my opinion, and you have had it, plain. No charge."

He rose, and Skinny with him, and after a few words more all around, the two went out.

"That was a flat fake," remarked Skinny, as soon as they reached the street.

"So it appears, my slender shadow. What is your opinion about the supposed case?"

"I don't believe there is any case at all. I guess it's a square deal, and the insurance folks will have to come down."

"It may be, but you can't say that this detective is altogether a fool. If he had no ability he would not be in the employ of that company, would he?"

"There's reason in that, sure."

"And he has a pair of eyes that speak for themselves."

"Well, what's your opinion, then? You seem to have something in your crop."

"My opinion is that there is a good deal in the case. I don't know what it is yet, but I'm going to find out."

"Great ginger! You don't mean to say you are going to work at it, do you?"

"That's what's the matter. I am interested in it. Sweet pertaters! you can't mention anything that's got a mystery to it, but what you raise my detective fever a few degrees. Going into it? Of course I'm going into it. And if a third case comes along, I'll tackle that, too."

There was no doubting that he meant it.

"You're going to get too many irons in the fire," warned Skinny, "and the first you know you will make a mess of everything."

"Well, there's one consolation, if I do."

"And what's that?"

"You'll be in the boat with me. We'll both go down together."

"Not much!" Skinny protested. "I've got nothing to do with it. It is your own funeral."

"All right, then, my tender little lily-of-the-valley, I'll remember that, and if good luck comes my way and I scoop that reward that's offered, you don't get a smell of it. How do you like that?"

"Oh! I'm in with you on that case," Skinny quickly assured. "I'm into it to protect you, as I've said before. It is this other that I'm kicking about."

Billy laughed, and bantered his thin partner all the way back to the hotel, where they went direct from the insurance office.

There Billy inquired whether anything new had appeared in regard to the murder mystery, and was assured that nothing had. It stood the same. What the inquest would bring out, remained to be seen.

The inquest was to be held on the following forenoon, if everything went according to programme, and Billy and Skinny promised themselves that they would be on hand.

The father of the murdered young man, it was understood, had declared his belief in the innocence of the accused man.

This was something Billy was glad to hear, for it was in accord with his own idea.

Billy watched his chance, and engaged his landlord in conversation again.

After some remarks about the murder, he changed the subject.

"Were you acquainted with Mr. Lodgelaw, who died some time ago?" he inquired.

"Yes; everybody knew him," was the answer. "Nice old man, but a good deal too easy-going for this rough world."

"How was that?"

"Oh, anybody could worm into his great big heart, that's all."

"Rather inclined to be generous and free with his money, I suppose?"

"Yes, though he didn't throw any of the needful away. Darn nice wife he got, all the same."

"In what sense do you mean that?"

"Mean just what I say. She's a fine little woman."

"Was she his wife long before he died?"

"A year or two; don't recollect just how long a spell it was."

"Married her here, did he?"

"No; she's from Mexico. Her folks was American, though."

"I see. I've heard about her delay in getting the insurance, or something of that kind. Seems to me she ought to have it."

"Oh, she'll get it; no doubt about that. Plenty of time yet. I suppose the company must monkey just so long, anyhow, and run it through the red-tape mill once or twice before they shell out."

"Probably. There's talk about there being fraud somewhere, but I don't see how that can be."

"That's all bosh. There was no fraud in honest old Hiram Lodgelaw; not a bit of it."

"No, of course not; but they think there was somebody else might have been concerned in it."

"Nonsense! The company will have to pony up, or they may as well shut up shop in this town."

"And the only one that could be concerned in fraud would be the widow."

"Yes; and you might as well look for fraud in an angel."

"That settles that affair then."

So Billy said, but he didn't speak his thoughts about it. He had had experience enough to know that appearances were not always to be relied on.

Not that he had any reason to believe there was anything wrong about the matter, but he had not investigated far enough to assure himself otherwise.

"I tell you what it is, Skinny," he remarked to his lean lieutenant, "we have got a full hand this time. If this insurance business

amounts to anything, and we unravel both cases, it will be a feather in our cap."

"Don't blow about it," advised Skinny. "My think about it is, that you will have all the work you want on the murder case, let alone any other."

"You mean *we*," Billy corrected. "You are into that affair with me, you know," laughing.

That evening the lads had not been long in their room when there came a knock at the door.

Opening it, the New York Gamin Detective found there an aged man, with white hair and whiskers, with a cane in his hand and a tremble in his frame.

"Guess you have come to the wrong door, sir," Billy politely suggested, as the man did not speak.

"I guess not, young man," was the slow answer. "Are you William Weston the detective? If so, you are the person I am seeking."

"That is my name," answered Billy; "but I don't lay very strong claim to the title, sir."

"Don't ye believe him," chipped in Skinny. "If I was to say he wasn't a detective, he'd choke me."

"Be still, shadow!" commanded Billy, with an authoritative wave of the hand.

The old gentleman stepped in, closing the door after him.

Billy eyed him keenly. He had never seen him before, that he was aware of. Who could he be?

"I see you do not recognize me," the man observed.

"You see straight this time," answered Billy, "for you hit the mark."

"Still you have met me before, and have even shaken hands with me. What is the matter with your eyes?"

Billy looked at him more keenly, at this, stepping nearer and giving him a close scrutiny. He had not suspected before that the man might be in disguise.

"Sweet pertaters!" he exclaimed, "but, you are a good one, and no mistake. I thought I had sharp eyes, but you closed them up tight. No one would be likely to recognize you."

Skinny looked on in amazement. He had not got at the man's identity yet.

"I thought I could stand the test," the man laughed, now in a more hearty tone of voice, but speaking low. And his trembling left him and he took a seat.

"Well I'll be hanged!" ejaculated Skinny, now learning who the man was, since he assumed his natural tone of voice. "Who would have thought it?"

"It is I, A. Keene Ferret, at your service," the visitor said, laughingly.

"But, what brings you here?" asked Billy. "Merely to test your rig-up?"

"Not that alone; but to carry out the interview we commenced at the office to-day."

An idea flashed through Billy's mind with the quickness of lightning. It was plain that the detective was not trusting the agent altogether, but was playing a double role with him.

"Ha! I see," ejaculated the boy. "You are not letting Mr. Clever-and-so-forth into all your doings."

"Exactly, and the way you talked when you were at the office led me to think pretty well of you."

"Glad of that! What do you want of me now?"

"I want to ask again just what your opinion is in regard to that case. Do you see anything crooked about it?"

"Not a thing," Billy assured. "It looks as clear and above-board as a bald head in the front row. Still, it will bear investigation, and when you begin that sort of thing, always begin with the woman in the case."

CHAPTER V

PROPOSAL ACCEPTED.

THE detective laughed at this odd and blunt manner of expression.

"You are a queer one, my lad," he remarked. "I like you, and the more I see of you the more I like you."

"That's owing to my fascinating ways," returned Billy, with a grin. "Before you know me a month you will be in love with me. That's what is the matter with Skinny here."

"Not what makes him so remarkably thin, you don't mean."

"Exactly. His regard for me is a consuming passion, and he is wasting away under the burning fires of his uncontrollable ardor. Oh, he has got it bad, and no mistake about that. Hey, Skinny?"

"You would have it worse, if I had a club handy," answered Skinny.

"Then I will look out and not let my regard for you run away with me," the detective joked.

"But about this case," Billy came to the point.

"You seem to think there is crooked work going on regarding the Lodgelaw affair, and you seem to have one eye aimed at Mr. Clever-and-some-more-of-it Finck."

"That is precisely it, Mr. Weston, and I want to see if you won't go into the affair with me and lend me some help. If you will, I will drop out and let you have the field almost all to yourself, and perhaps if there is anything wrong in the air, you will get at it."

"I'm willing to try it," Billy declared. "Fact is, I have already begun to look after it a little. I meant to settle it in my mind one way or the other."

"Well, you are an odd one. You seem to be born to detective work. From what I have heard of you, I am more than willing to take you in upon this case, and if you discover anything you will be rewarded."

"All right; and now let's get at it. What is your suspicion? What do you want me to do?"

"We will consider your first question first. Mr. Finck is a man who has not been in the employ of the Equivalent Company very long. His business has been light, and he never had a big policy on his list till this of Mr. Lodgelaw. These things have combined to make the company suspicious. You can see how that is yourself."

"Yes, I see."

"Well, the suspicion is, then, that if there is anything wrong this young man may have had a hand in it. I have had my eye upon him for some days, but can discover nothing. He knows I am here, and of course would carry himself mighty straight. Whether there is anything crooked about him or not, remains to be seen. That answers the first question you put. Now for the second."

"My own plan was, to give Mr. Finck the impression that I believed the matter to be perfectly honest all around, and to take my leave. Then I would come back in disguise and give the affair a new turn, without his knowledge. But I have discovered one thing about this young gentleman, and that is, that he has a wonderfully keen pair of eyes, and he might suspect something or might penetrate my disguise. With you, however, it would be different. What do you say?"

"I have said it already," reminded Billy. "I have said that I am willing to try it. Go ahead and let me in on the ground floor of your little scheme."

"Well, it is simple, and about as I have outlined it. I will pretend to go away satisfied, and you can take up the case where I leave it off. I will merely drop down to Albuquerque for a day, and will return in disguise, but will leave you to do the work till I am wanted to help. I will stop here at this house with you, and so will be near you all the time. I will appear as an aged Mexican, and will register as Don Alva Paso, from Mexico."

"Good enough. I'll try my hand at it, with the help of my lean lieutenant here, and I guess we can sift Mr. Clever-and-some-what-additional Finck, and find out whether there is anything wrong with him or not."

"And then it is understood that you will do it, and I may depend on you, eh?"

"You bet! When Broadway William says a thing, that is the thing he means, most generally. You can count on us, every time."

"All right; I will depend on you. Don Alva Paso will appear here in a day or so, and you will let him know what progress you have made, and consult with him about the affair from time to time."

"Correct; that's settled. We'll cast out a hook in Mr. Clever-with-another-addition's way, and if we get a bite there'll be some fun, you bet. Sweet pertaters! we must be doing something to keep our blood in motion, you know."

"And you speak for your partner, too, of course?"

"Yes, I have to," Billy quickly declared. "You see Skinny is so frail that he has to be careful of himself, and in order to save him all the wear and tear possible, I talk for him."

"That ain't so at all," Skinny quickly protested. "He is stuffin' you, Mr. Ferret. The reason I don't have much to say, is because I never get the chance to put in a word when Billy is around. When he gets that mill of his to running there is no show for anybody else."

"Now, Skinny, how can you?" said Billy, reproachfully. "After all the good things I have been saying about you, how can you? After the way I have stuck to you through thick and thin

—particularly thin, you ought to be ashamed of yourself to make so light of a serious matter. I haven't said a single word that won't stand the truth, and you can't deny it."

"If you would give him a chance, perhaps Mr. Ferret would like to say something more."

"Sweet pertaters! what am I doin'? Mr. Ferret has got the floor, I'm sure, and can say whatever he likes."

"If you give him the chance, you mean. Choke off and give your jaws a rest."

"One would think you two fellows were on the point of fighting," observed the detective.

"If you were nearer of a size, I would really expect to see you coming to blows. But I understand your play. By the way, anything new in that murder case, Mr. Weston?"

"Nothing so far," answered Billy. "If you strike anything, I suppose you will take a hand in that, Mr. Ferret."

"No, I think not. If anything should come my way, I'll pass it along to you and let you make use of it. That will be fair for your help on my case."

"Good enough, it's a bargain. Skinny, we'll call this Broadway Billy's double duty, or something meaning the same. I would give it a more snappy name than that, but you might get offended."

"Don't expect me to ask what it would be," said Skinny, "for I don't want to hear any of your poor gags."

"All right; but you've missed the best one you ever heard—rather didn't hear, in your life."

"I guess I can stand it. I'd rather take my chances of life without it than with it."

"He's little, but oh, my!" exclaimed Billy, turning to Ferret, with a wave of the hand at his thin partner.

This was carried on for some minutes, and at length Mr. Ferret took his leave.

"Well, what do you think, Skin?" Billy asked then, seriously.

"I think you have got your hands about full, if you tackle this double case," was the response.

"Mebby I have, Skin, but we are equal to it, I imagine, you and me; and if we don't yank the bun it will be because it is hung too high."

Next morning at the hour of the inquest the lads were on hand at the residence of Barrington Rentaway, where it was to be held.

They found the main room of the house well filled, but were admitted, and made themselves as comfortable as possible in a corner where they were out of the way, but where they could see and hear everything.

The inquest opened in the usual form, and proceeded in the time-honored manner.

The first witness was the landlord of the hotel where the crime had been done, who was required to tell what he knew about it.

This he did, and two others were called for about the same questions, as if it was necessary to prove that Harry Rentaway had really been shot, and that it was not a mistake.

That fact established, and that was about all, too, for it was a mystery of the deepest sort; other witnesses were called. One was the man who had let out that he had overheard a quarrel between Harry and Harrison Waldmar.

After he was done, then came the witnesses who had seen Waldmar hastening from the vicinity of the hotel about the time of the crime, and who supported what they had previously made known. There was a dark look on the face of the evidence for the young man.

Finally Harrison Waldmar was called to speak for himself.

Broadway Billy and his lean lieutenant were eager to get a sight of him, to form their own opinion of his character.

They found him to be a young man, good looking, with a pair of honest eyes that won the New York delegates' favor to him immediately.

"There's no murderer about that feller, an' I'll bet a gooseberry on it," observed Billy to Skinny, aside.

"I gree with ye on that," the thin partner whispered back. "If he is, I'll never judge a man by his face again."

The prisoner was pale and worn in appearance, as though he had passed a sleepless night, but his bearing was cool and firm, though sad. He took his place with a firm step.

The preliminary inquiries were put and responded to, and then the coroner came to the point with a vital question as to where he, the prisoner, was at the time of the crime.

"I suppose I passed the hotel a few minutes before," was the reply. "At the exact time I think I was at home. I can not be sure to a few minutes one way or the other."

"Did you see Harry Rentaway?"
 "I did not."
 "And saw nothing of the excitement at the hotel?"
 "Nothing."
 "When did you first hear of the murder?"
 "When I was put under arrest."
 "And you knew nothing about it previously?"
 "No."

It was a clear denial all along that line.
 "Now," spoke the coroner, "when you were arrested a pistol was found in your possession. One chamber had been recently discharged. The bullet that killed Harry Rentaway fits your weapon exactly. What can you say to this?"
 "It is the fate of circumstance," was the answer.

"Will you explain when you fired your weapon last, and for what purpose?"

"No; I can not explain that. I assure you, however, that I am innocent of the crime with which I am charged."

"If that is so, and we want to believe it so, you must make an effort to do away with this damaging proof. The circumstantial evidence is against you, and your life is in danger, as you must know. Weigh well your words, for upon your response to this will depend your fate."

CHAPTER VI.

A STREAK OF GOOD LUCK.

FOR some seconds the prisoner was silent. Evidently a struggle of some sort was going on in his mind while he hesitated.

Every eye was upon him, and indeed his fate seemed to hang upon his words, one way or the other, as he might turn the balance in his favor or against him.

"I have but one answer to make," he finally said. "I did not kill Harry Rentaway. I did not know he was dead until my arrest. Where I had been, and why my pistol had been discharged, are points I cannot answer now."

"You had better think well before—"

"That is my answer," was the interruption. "I cannot tell more. I am bound to silence, and cannot speak. Do not press me further, but let matters take their own course. By the time my trial comes around, events may have shaped themselves in my favor."

And that was all he said, all he would say.

The inquest was concluded, and the case given to the jury for decision.

The verdict was what might have been expected, and Harrison Waldmar was held for trial upon the evidence.

Waldmar maintained his composure when he heard the verdict, and leaned back in his chair in a manner of easy resignation.

For some seconds silence reigned, finally broken by the father of the murdered young man.

Stepping forward and facing the prisoner, he said:

"Harrison, I cannot understand this, but you have the assurance that I am one who believes you innocent. Here's my hand on it."

The young man looked up, and tears dimmed his eyes as he took the offered hand of the sorrowing father.

"Thank you, Mr. Rentaway," he spoke, huskily. "You are not mistaken, for I swear to you that I am innocent of the crime. Make every effort to get hold of the murderer."

Their hands pressed firmly, and Barrington Rentaway was from that moment Waldmar's staunchest friend, in spite of appearances against him.

Some few there were who sneered at this, and said it was good acting on the part of Waldmar, but others merely shook their heads.

As for Billy and Skinny, they held to their conviction about the matter, and said nothing.

They left the room before the crowd, but did not quit the house.

Turning down the hall, they sat down on a settee that was partly hid behind the overhanging staircase.

Here they waited, talking about the matter, until finally the last of the men had left the house, and Mr. Rentaway and his servants were alone once more.

With the front door closed, they were in partial darkness where they sat, and no one discovered them, and they remained there some time longer before making any move in the program they had outlined.

Mr. Rentaway could be heard walking to and fro in the room where the body of his dead son lay, and the voices of the servants, when they were heard at all, were low-toned and saddened. A terrible blow had fallen upon this home.

At last Billy and Skinny came forth, and Billy tapped lightly upon the door where Mr. Rentaway was known to be.

No response at first, and he knocked again.

This time the door opened.

Mr. Rentaway was seen to give a start of surprise as his eyes fell upon them, and he demanded:

"How came you here? What do you want?"

"We were here at the inquest," answered Billy, "and haven't gone away yet. What we want is to help you find the murderer of your son."

"You are the two detective lads who cleared up that bank affair, are you not?"

"You have hit it right," Billy assured.

"Come in here, then, and I will talk with you."

With that the gentleman threw the door open wider, and they stepped into the room.

It was the room in the rear of the one where the inquest had been held, and there the body of the dead young man lay.

"Now," spoke Mr. Rentaway, when he had given the lads seats, "what do you propose to do in the matter?"

"We want to get a start the first thing we do," replied Billy. "We want to inquire whether you have any suspicion against any one."

"No, I have not; none whatever."

"But you do believe they have got the wrong man?"

"I know they have. Harrison Waldmar never killed my boy, never."

"We are inclined to agree with you there, sir. That's what we think, and we want to find out who did."

"You do that, my lads, and you shall have the reward I have offered. I mean to have the wretch, if it costs me my last dollar and a lifetime hunt."

"That's the way to go at it, sir. Now, do you know whether your son had any enemy or not?"

"He hadn't an enemy in the world. It is true that he and Waldmar had some trouble about Miss Wesselley, but that amounted to nothing compared with a crime like this."

"Yes, that all came out at the inquest, and a thought struck me at the time," Billy meditated.

"What was the thought?" Mr. Rentaway at once queried.

"That perhaps there is a third lover in the field, who?"

"Thunder!" the old gentleman ejaculated. "I hadn't thought of that!"

"Then do you know of some one who was knocked out by your son when he got into the lady's good graces?"

"No; I don't; but, the idea is a good one. It may be the case, and it must be looked into. What lackbrains we all were not to think of that before!"

"There may be something in it, or there may not; it is about an even thing." Still, it is not to be overlooked. I want to go and see this lady, and wish you would give me a note of introduction to her."

"I'll do better than that; I'll go with you."

"No, that won't do. I don't want it to appear too openly that I am working on the case. It wouldn't matter about Skinny, for he could not be seen between us, if we walked close together."

"I see, I see," the gentleman interrupted. "Well, I'll give you the note, and I hope you will make something out of your visit. Hunt down the murderer of my boy, lads, and you will have earned my undying gratitude."

"We'll do it, if it can be done," Billy faithfully promised.

Mr. Rentaway stepped to a desk and hastily wrote a brief note, handing it to Billy and telling him where the lady lived.

Billy and his lieutenant returned to their hotel. It was not their intention to make their call on the lady immediately.

A little while after supper they set out, and still not in the direction of Miss Wesselley's home, but toward where the dead Mr. Lodgelaw had lived.

Interested in that case too, they had to give it a share of their attention, and had agreed to give a look in that direction next.

Evening was coming on, but there was plenty of light yet, and as they turned into the street upon which the Lodgelaw residence was situated, they noticed a woman ahead of them in deepest mourning.

She was going in the same direction they were, but at a much slower pace, and they paid no attention to her, further than a casual glance.

"Hello!" Billy presently exclaimed, "here comes that young Mexican what's stoppin' at the hotel where we are, Skinny!"

"Yes, that's him, sure. S'pose he's out takin' a stroll for his health, after his supper."

"Same as we are, eh? Mebby he's a detective, too, in disguise?"

"He's in disguise, if he is one, that's sure."

The man in question was coming toward them, and was about meeting the woman in mourning.

They met and passed just as Billy offered his last remark, and the young detectives noticed that the lady gave a start, and stopped and looked after the Mexican when he had gone by.

"Hal! what does that mean?" questioned Billy.

"She's stuck on his shape, I guess," ventured Skinny.

"Too bad we're so close, or we might pipe 'em off. We'll have to go on."

The woman, standing irresolute for a second, started after the Mexican, at a quick pace, and soon laid a hand on his arm.

Billy and Skinny were upon them now, and there was no chance for them to do anything but keep right on about their business. And certainly this was none of their business, they had to own.

"Miguel, isn't it you?" they heard the woman demand, in full, rich voice.

"Who are you?" was the question.

The heavy veil was drawn aside an instant, just as Billy passed, and he caught sight of a handsome face.

"Afa!" the Mexican exclaimed.

Their hands clasped, and Billy and Skinny keeping on their way, heard no more.

"Case number three!" observed Billy, as soon as they were well away from the pair.

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't you ketch on?"

"Well I did! You know this Mexican is registered at the hotel as Pablo Costo, but this woman called him Miguel!"

"Great ginger! so she did! But, that's nothing to us. If you go to tryin' to find out who he is, hang me if I don't have you examined for softening of the brain; I will, sure."

They laughed and continued on their way.

Billy glanced back, after a few seconds, and saw the couple still there.

A moment later and he glanced back again. The woman was coming on her way, and the Mexican was going on his.

"That's nothing to us," observed Billy. "The woman may be his sister, for all we know, and it's none of our business anyhow. Here's the house we are looking for, I take it."

The house in question was on the other side of the street, and all its front windows were closed with shutters.

They had paused opposite the house, and were taking a survey of it, without any very particular interest, when the woman in mourning was seen to cross the street and continue on the other side.

It was growing dusk, but still plenty light enough for them to see.

They moved on slowly, not wanting to be seen paying too close attention to the house, as the woman was nearly opposite them now, and suddenly they were given a slight thrill of renewed interest. The veiled woman turned and entered that very house, proving that she was at home there.

CHAPTER VII.

ANGLING FOR POINTERS.

"SWEET pertaters, skinned eels, whoopin' cough and no-money-in!" and Broadway Billy pirouetted around in his old-time boyish manner. "What's bitin' ye now?" demanded Skinny, half ashamed of his partner's antics on the public street. "Are ye crazy?"

"Don't ye see what's th' matter?" and Billy, coming to a sudden stop, faced his lieutenant. "Didn't ye glue yer optics to ther fact that our woman in black went into that house?"

"Great ginger! is that what you're makin' all ther fuss about? I didn't know but what you'd found a fortune in diamonds, or some such trifling thing as that. Hope you won't cut up any more in sich a way. Your're gettin' too big."

"Maybe I am, Skinny, but I couldn't help it. I feel jest as young as I ever did, and I went off afore I thought."

"And you act jest as young, too, most of the time," Skinny complained in a reproving way.

"Well, come along, lean one, and we'll talk about it. What will you bet that that woman isn't the widow of the late lamented Lodgelaw?"

"That idea popped into my head, too, and I don't know what to think about it, one way or t'other," was Skinny's reply.

"If it is, we've got our eyes on her, and we know she knows our Pablo Costo, at the hotel; whose real name seems to be Miguel."

"Yes; and if he ain't blind in one eye and deaf in the other, he knows that we spotted him, too," reminded Skinny.

"I s'pose he saw us, funny if he didn't; but we ambled right by, 'tendin' to our own business, an' mebbly he wouldn't think nothin' of it. Anyhow, if our guess is right, he's another sinker on our line."

"But how are we goin' ter find out if it was Mrs. Lodgelaw we seen?"

"Why, we'll make it our business ter see the genuine article before long, and then we'll know."

"All right. Where to now?"

"Well, we have sized up this mansion, let's amble around and call on Miss Wesselley. It will be gettin' dark by the time we get there."

"I'm with ye."

"Glad ye told me. I was just goin' to feel fer ye."

"Say, how old are you, Billy?"

"Crowdin' twenty. Why?"

"Do you think you'll be a man when you are twenty-one?"

"I'd smile if I wasn't," answered Billy, "if I keep on growin'. But what are you drivin' at?"

"I'm hopin' you will be. Mebbly then you'll stop your blame foolin' all the time. You don't know how tired it makes me."

Billy laughed heartily.

"That reminds me that I have got to crowd a good deal of fun into a brief period of while," he remarked. "The time is short, so you will have to grin and bear it a little longer, feather-weight."

"That is accordin' to how you spread it on," retorted Skinny. "If you go to spreadin' it on too thick, and then tryin' to rub it in, the way you have been doin', I'll get a soft club and batter your head in with it. So you'd better taper off a little, I tell you."

This sort of talk was kept up until they had reached their destination.

The Wesselley residence was a neat one, bespeaking wealth and station for the family, and when Billy pulled the bell, he and Skinny put on their best faces.

The lads were still in their cowboy attire, but their appearance was rather more neat than rough.

A servant answered the summons, and Billy inquired for Miss Wesselley and was allowed to enter the hall, he and his partner together.

"What name shall I say?" asked the girl, a rather pretty miss of about seventeen years.

"You needn't say any name, Miss Rosy-cheek," answered Billy, favoring the girl with a smile. "Just give her this note, if you please."

"And will you wait for an answer?"

"You bet!" pleasantly, and with a wink.

The girl blushed to her hair, and turned away, evidently wondering what manner of young man this could be.

When she returned, it was to show the lads into the parlor, where they made themselves at home until Miss Wesselley came down.

They had not long to wait, for presently a handsome, stately young lady entered the room. She was pale, and her eyes showed a redness that told of weeping.

Billy and Skinny arose as she came in, and were pleasantly greeted, and after the first exchange of words, were told to resume their seats, the lady taking a chair quite near them.

"I suppose Mr. Rentaway mentioned in his note the reason for our calling on you," Billy remarked.

"Yes; but very briefly," was the sad answer.

"You are trying to discover who murdered poor Harry, he tells me."

"That is what we want to do," Billy assured.

"And you want to make some inquiries of me?"

"Yes; if you please."

"Well, ask anything you like. I will tell you everything I can."

"What do you think about the arrest that has been made?"

"You speak of Mr. Waldmar."

"Yes; has any other been made?"

"Not that I know of. I wanted to be sure. Why, I cannot bring myself to believe that he is guilty."

"Mr. Rentaway is of the opinion positively that he is not. You know all about the reason of his being suspected, of course."

"Yes; and it is most unfortunate."

"No one will deny that. Now the question is, Miss Wesselley, is there any other man who might have ill will toward Mr. Rentaway for the same reason?"

"No, positively, so far as I know."

"In a matter like this there's no getting around unpleasant questions," explained Billy. "I want to help clear Waldmar, if he is innocent, and I want to bring the guilty man to face the music."

Has any one been paying unwelcome attentions to you? Any person who might think he could win your favor with Mr. Rentaway out of the way?"

The young lady's face was burning, but she met the question frankly, knowing its importance.

"No, no one, so far as I know," she replied. "Mr. Rentaway and Mr. Waldmar are the only gentlemen with whom I have been on really intimate terms. To Mr. Rentaway I was affianced."

"And there has been no one, one whom you would not notice socially, perhaps, who has annoyed you?"

"No one, sir."

"And there is no one whom you can suspect of having done the crime?"

"Positively no one. It is a mystery to me. If Waldmar is innocent, and I cannot believe him guilty, I do not know who the assassin can have been."

"That settles that part of the matter, then," declared Billy. "Now, knowing Harry as well as you did, have you ever heard him speak of having any enemy? Or being at the outs with any one?"

"Never. He was liked by everybody, and had not an enemy. That is what makes the crime so difficult to understand."

"That's another point settled," Billy decided, as he mentally checked it off his list. "Now here is another, and I want you to think well before you answer it. I have kept it till the last because I attach more importance to it."

"Let me hear the question. It shall be fairly dealt with. You may be sure I am anxious to have the guilty party found out."

"I believe it. Now the question is this: Is there any woman, as far as you know, who loved Harry, and would be your rival? One who might have become desperate enough to kill him to cheat you of his love?"

The young woman had paled at this. It was clearly something she had not thought of before.

She hesitated some moments before replying.

"No," she finally answered, firmly, "none. There are some who undoubtedly regarded Harry with much favor, but not one who can be thought guilty of anything of this sort. I will not mention their names."

"I have to depend on what you choose to tell me," Billy reminded.

"And you may depend on this, fully. No woman, so far as I am permitted to know, can be suspected of this crime."

"That settles it. That knocks out the last prop. Either Waldmar is guilty, it seems, or there is a dark horse in the race. I mean to find out the truth of the matter, if it can be done."

"And I only hope you will be able to clear the mystery up."

"Might I be allowed to put in my car?" Skinny asked, at this point.

"Why, cert," assented his pard. "Step out more in the light though, so we can see you while you talk."

Skinny paid no attention to this, but addressed Miss Wesselley.

"Have you any idea about the secret that Harrison Waldmar is holding back?—the secret concerning the empty chamber found in his revolver when he was arrested?"

"Bully for you!" exclaimed Billy, giving Skinny a slap on the shoulder. "I have been trying all along to tell you that you are the brains of our combination, but you wouldn't believe it."

"No, I have not," the young lady answered.

"I have been wondering about that a good deal, and it puzzles me."

"And nobody else seems to know anything about it," added Skinny. "It is plain that he fired at something, and that not a great while before his arrest, but I can't see what it was, if he didn't kill Rentaway. And, if he did that, what would be easier than for him to say he had shot at a dog, or something of that kind?"

"Allan Pinkerton Vidocq Skinny!" cried Billy. "You reason like a veteran, and I'm proud of you. I'm going to promote you and raise your pay, sure."

In spite of her sadness, and the sadness of the occasion—or the interview, for her, the lady had to smile.

"You mustn't mind him, miss," Skinny remarked, apologetically. "He is subject to such spells, and can't help it."

"But I mean it," Billy persisted. "You can't imagin how proud I am of this attenuated atom of nothing, Miss Wesselley. I leave it to you if his question don't show a brainy head."

"It was certainly a question that ought to be answered," was the response.

"And it must be answered," Billy declared. "I'm going to learn where that missing bullet went to. 'If it killed Harry Rentaway, so much the worse for Waldmar, that's all.'"

"I wish you all success. Indeed, I only hope that you will be able to sift the matter to the bottom. Now, is there anything further you would like to ask me concerning the case?"

"No, I guess not," answered Billy. "That seems to wind it up, and with your permission I will amble, taking my shadow with me."

There was no objection, and after some further remarks, they "ambled."

CHAPTER VIII.

A SPLENDID RUN OF RIPE LUCK.

"WELL, what next to be done?" asked Skinny, when they were once more upon the street of the quiet old town.

"We'll do some private thinking now I guess, my gay an' festive tidbit," was the response. "We have got a big thing on hand, if we only knew it."

"I have an idea that you'll find it heavy before you are done with it," was Skinny's comment. "It wouldn't surprise me any if you found it too heavy to carry to the end of the stretch."

"We, my gay an' festive cherub, we," Billy corrected. "Remember you are in this thing with me. Don't forget that. I know you won't, if we happen to gobble that big reward, and I'll see that you don't forget it if we fail. We are both in it, so please say *we*."

"All right; anything to please you. But where to now?"

"Back to the house, I guess."

"What for?"

"It's a good place to get news."

"Well, and what after that? What's your plan?"

"That brings us back to the beginstment of our observations, little one. We must do some thinking."

"Well, think away, then, and when you have got your grip on the right idea, let me know. I'm no good at plannin', and never was."

"Modesty is a virtue, Skinny. I wish I had that virtue. I have got 'most all the rest of 'em, but that one seems to be lacking in my composition. That's what you've told me, anyhow."

Skinny was responding to that, somewhat at length, when Billy suddenly interrupted with his usual exclamation.

"Sweet pertaters!" he muttered, "we are in for something more, Skin!"

"What's that?" demanded Skinny.

"Look jest ahead, other side."

"Ginger!"

"That's our Mr. Clever-and-knows-he-is Finck, sure."

"Shall we follow him, and see what he's up to?"

"You bet! It won't do any harm even if it don't do any good. Say, Skinny, I believe you are going to make a famous detective."

"What makes you say that? No more of your blame foolishness now, or I'll jump on ye."

"That wouldn't hurt, not a bit; you're too light. But what I was going to say, you're bound to be famous because you are such a splendid shadow-er."

Skinny made a motion as though he meant to draw a revolver and shoot Billy on the spot, and if it hadn't been necessary for them to observe silence just then, he would perhaps have made it interesting.

Mr. Finck was some distance ahead of them now, and they set out after him, the shades of night favoring them. They had made out their man as he passed under a lamp, and believed that they had not been noticed by him in turn.

The agent was a sprightly young man, well dressed always, and on this occasion seemed to be a little more than usually so, the brief glance Billy had had of him; and walked with a quick, nervous step.

The lads kept him in sight, and soon were interested to find that he was going in the direction of the Lodgelaw residence.

Little was said between them now, and they followed their man with all care not to be detected.

Finck held to his course, and presently was opposite the Lodgelaw dwelling.

There he noticeably slackened his pace, and ere long stopped.

Billy and Skinny did likewise.

The next moment the young man stooped and struck a match on the ground, as it appeared, and proceeded to light a cigar.

He was standing facing the house now, and

when the match had burned into a bright flame he applied it to the cigar, giving three strong puffs at intervals of a second apart.

This done, he went leisurely on.

Perhaps the lads would not have thought anything of this, or at any rate they might not have attached much importance to it, but, a moment later, a sound was heard on the opposite side of the street.

It was like a clapping of hands, and was heard three times, giving three distinct raps at intervals of about a second.

Broadway Billy caught hold of Skinny.

"Sweet pertaters! Can one, did you hear that?" he demanded.

"Yes, I heard it hard enough," was the reply.

"What do you think of it?"

"What do you?"

"If it wasn't a signal, then it's the strangest coincidence I ever heard of, that's all."

"The same idee hit me, and hit me hard, too."

"Then we've got to take it as such."

"What's goin' to be done?"

"It's got to be done quick. You go on and follow Clever-and-so-forth, and I will hang 'round here and spot the house. We'll meet at the hotel when we find there's nothin' to be gained."

"Quereck," decided Skinny. "I'm off like a hossfly."

And away he went, and his shadowy form was soon swallowed in the gathering gloom.

This house was a corner one, and Billy took up his station where he could keep an eye in two directions.

He had before taken note that there was a side entrance as well as a front, and in order not to let anything escape him he must watch both.

It was some time before there was any sign of life about the house. Then a light appeared over the hall door, as though carried by a person coming down stairs.

This light grew brighter, then diminished, and finally disappeared again and all was dark as before. A little time later and Billy heard a door close, and he was on the alert instantly.

The next moment a dark form came out from the side gate, turned down the street, and moved rapidly away.

Needless to say the Gotham Gamin followed. It was his business to learn who this person was.

Approaching as near as he considered safe, he followed after, almost as silently as the person's own shadow.

Straight toward the outskirts of the town he was led, in the direction in which he had met with his other adventures, and with which neighborhood he was somewhat acquainted by this time.

He noticed that the woman—he had made the figure out to be a woman—kept to the most deserted of the streets, and proceeded straight ahead without a glance to the right or left.

Finally, in a really lonesome place, not far from a growth of trees and the ruins of some old building, she stopped.

Billy immediately sunk to the ground, and crept forward, keeping in the shadow of everything that offered.

He soon found himself behind a low portion of the wall of an old building, where a surprise awaited him.

Putting forth his hand to creep just a little further before stopping, he placed it upon something warm, and drew back quickly.

Instantly his hand sought a revolver, but before he could draw the weapon he felt a cold muzzle pressed against his forehead. And immediately a voice in lowest whisper demanded:

"Who is it?"

Billy recognized the voice.

It was the lean lieutenant whom he had stumbled upon!

"It's me—Billy," he hastened to declare. "Be still as a rat dead in a trap."

The weapon was removed, and the lads were as silent as as though no living thing was behind the wall.

Immediately they heard steps on the opposite side, and the next moment there were low words of greeting between a man and a woman.

Billy needed no one to explain the situation to him. Skinny had followed his man to this place, and the signals they had seen and heard were to this end.

After their first words, the man and woman drew near to the stone wall, and in another moment were leaning upon it in easy conversation. The pard detectives had never had a better "snap."

"And you think it is now all safe?" the woman questioned.

"I am sure of it," was the response. "The

detective has gone away satisfied. That is proof of it."

"I am glad. I did not see how they could find anything wrong. We know there was not, and therefore no need for them to question it."

"You are right. You will now probably get the insurance in the course of a few weeks. In the mean time you must keep exceedingly close, and play the sad widow to perfection."

"I do not think you can find any fault with the way I have been playing the role, Cleverdale."

"Indeed, no! But, you mustn't relax a bit. Keep it right up."

"I will do that, until I close my hands over the thousands, anyhow."

"Yes, and afterward too. Our little private arrangement must be of slow growth. We must not be seen together under a year at least."

"I suppose not."

"It would raise a talk, you know, and talk might raise the devil."

"I understand you perfectly. After due time, then we will meet, become better acquainted, finally you will be my lover, and then—"

"And then a neat little wedding, and yours truly will fill the dead man's shoes and help you enjoy the money. In the mean time we can have our little meetings on the quiet just the same."

"Of course."

At this point these pretty rogues exchanged a kiss, and Billy and Skinny exchanged a sly poke in the ribs.

"How are we to communicate?" the woman presently asked.

"By leaving sealed notes at the place agreed upon, the best way I know of," was the answer.

"I suppose so. It will hardly do to make use of the post-office."

"Decidedly not. Every precaution must be observed, especially until you get your hands on that money."

So they talked on, finally drifting into the soft nothings of the love-sick idiot and spooney maid.

The listening lads heard sufficient to let them well into the scheme the pair had in action. They had planned to have the husband insured, and now that he was out of the way, wanted the money, intending to marry as soon as they considered it safe to do so!

Finally the pair parted and went off, in different directions, and Billy and Skinny came forth from their place of hiding. They fell into each other's arms, held their sides with laughing, and acted like unruly, mild lunatics generally.

CHAPTER IX.

BILLY AND SKINNY INTERVIEWED.

WHEN they had become half rational again, Skinny demanded:

"Well, what's th' tone of yer think now, Pard Billy? Do ye think we'll git thar and corral th' herd?"

"It will be the strangest thing you ever heard of if we don't, my gay an' festive little snoozer. If we don't shake some persimmons off ther tree, you kin take me out an' kick me, that's all!"

"Great ginger! but wasn't it ther sickest old time you ever saw?"

"I should say it was. That woman is one gay old widow. Pity the ghost of old Lodgelaw didn't appear to 'em, an' scare 'em out of their boots."

"Right you be. But I guess ghosts is a dead fake, or his would have been on hand, sure. There's one thing we didn't get hold of, Billy. There ain't much doubt about it, though."

"What's that, slender one?"

"They didn't let on whether they killed the old man or not."

"No, they didn't let that out, that's so; but you kin bet on it that they had a hand in his goin' off."

"It would be funny if they hadn't, after plannin' to get him insured as they did, a-purpose ter git ther spondulics after he had petered out. Whew! but it was a cold deal on him."

"Skinny, this world is full of jest sich p'izen critters. What a pity it is that all folks can't be good, true and beautiful, like you and me. What a glorious old world it would be then! But sich ain't ther case, and hence we mourn."

"Oh, dry up with yer fillysoffykil nonsense, Billy. We ain't got no time fer any of that now. We have got our hands full, an' we have got ter hustle and git our grip onto these hard-case sinners. I'm jest itchin', now, ter see 'em squirm when we begin ter wind 'em up."

"Made up your mind that it is we, have you?" laughed Billy. "I thought you would, when

you saw the prospects of victory loomin' up. And this is th' case you was fightin' against our takin', too. This don't say who killed Harry Rentaway, not by a big heap it don't. We ain't half done yet. But come along, snoozer, and we'll amble back to town."

In due time they were again at their hotel, their point of departure and base of supplies, as Billy termed it.

They entered with lazy easiness, as though they had been out for a stroll and had been taking plenty of time about it, and Billy looked around to see who was in the room.

He hardly expected to find the old Mexican, "Don Alva Paso," there yet, but thought possibly he might be. He was not, however, but the other Mexican, Pablo Costo, was. He was seated at a table, dreamily smoking cigarettes.

Billy paid no attention to him, but fell into conversation with the landlord for a little while.

There was nothing new regarding the murder mystery, so far as he was able to hear.

Work on the cases seemed to be about done for that day.

When Billy and Skinny turned away from the landlord, the Mexican accosted them, pulling chairs for them to sit down.

Billy readily accepted the invitation, but declined the cigarettes.

"No, thank you," he said, "I don't care to imbibe any poison this evening; I don't indulge."

Much to his surprise, the face of the Mexican assumed a dirty pallor, about the color of putty, and he seemed for the second to be somewhat confused.

"Wh—what do you mean?" he asked.

"You don't imagine I would poison you, do you?"

Billy was still wrestling mentally with the man's sudden changing of color, and his confusion at the innocent remark he had made. But undoubtedly it meant nothing, he decided.

"No, of course not," he responded, "but I would poison myself if I smoked these things. I am 'posed to cigarettes the worst way. I've seen too much of their deadly work in New York."

"Oh, ah! Now I see. Ha, ha, ha! But these are different, my young friend; you see I make them myself."

"Can't help it," answered Billy. "There's only two kinds of cigarettes."

"And what two kinds are they?"

"The bad and the mighty bad."

The Mexican laughed.

"Well, sorry you won't smoke," he remarked, putting the things in his pocket. "Perhaps you won't object to some wine at my expense."

"There you hit me wrong again," answered Billy, pleasantly, but firmly. "We don't drink anything in that line, my pard and I, so we'll have to decline with thanks, and let you have our share."

"Well, you are exceptions to the rule, for cowboys, that's certain. That is what I take you to be, by your dress—cowboys."

"And you ain't far from wrong."

"You can't object to a quiet chat, then, certainly."

"I'm with you there, every time!" Billy exclaimed. "I can hold my end up in a confab, every time."

"I have received that impression of you," was the smiling response, "and I guess your partner is not far behind you."

"Skinny behind? Never! He's small, but he gets there."

"And I guess both of you are in the habit of getting there, judging by what I hear about you."

"You mustn't believe half you hear," said Billy. "If you do you will find that you have been stuffed a good many times with fancy fiction."

"But there is no fiction about this, I guess. You have the reputation of being quite able detectives, and I understand you are trying your hands at the mystery of this shooting."

"That's it," cried Billy. "Give a dog a bad name, and he's got to carry it whether he would or not. Just because we happened to get mixed up in that bank affair, we are expected to get tangled up in this other thing, too."

"But you are paying attention to it, are you not?"

"Everybody is interested," answered Billy.

"I see you don't want to admit that you are after the rascal. What prospect is there of getting at the truth of it, provided Waldmar is the wrong man?"

"Sweet pertaters!" exclaimed Billy, "do you

take me for a wise man out of the East? What do I know about it, any more than anybody else? If any clew happened to get in my way, of course I'd pick it up; but, as it is— Well, you know as much about the affair as I do."

"Then you admit that you don't know anything about it."

"That's about the size of it."

"My opinion is," remarked the Mexican, "that the man who has been arrested is the right one. No sane man would act as he does, if he wasn't."

"I have a notion that way myself," confessed the New York lad, "but then a fellow can't always tell."

"True enough; but it don't stand to reason that a sane man would keep still in such a fix if he had any way of clearing himself."

"That's what's the matter. Here's Skinny, frinstance. Do you suppose he'd stay as thin as he is, if he had any way of pickin' up meat an' gettin' fat? Not by a hatful!"

"And do you suppose Billy would be the fool he is, if he could help that?" chipped in Skinny. "He was born so, an' he can't help it any more'n I can help bein' a little thin."

"A little thin!" exclaimed Billy. "Why, you're the thinnest thin anybody ever seen. If you was any thinner, there wouldn't be anything of you at all. A hairpin would be fat alongside of you."

The Mexican laughed heartily over their badinage, and changed the subject.

"You were out walking, I take it," he observed.

"You take it about right then," acknowledged Billy.

"I have been out too, but I didn't happen to fall in with you."

"We walked about all over the town; which way did you go?"

The Mexican gave a general idea of the route he had taken, being particular, as Billy saw, to mention the street upon which the lads had run across him.

"Why, we were through that street," Billy admitted. "It must have been either before or after you was there, I suppose. Quite a pleasant old town at evening, isn't it?"

He was willing to drop the question as of no importance.

It was his idea to let the Mexican think he had not been seen at all.

"Yes, it is indeed. By the way, did you meet a lady all in black in any of your wanderings?"

The man was evidently eager to push the matter to the last, to find out whether he had been recognized or not.

He little knew that he was tampering with dynamite in this same Broadway Billy. That every word he uttered in this direction put the lad more keenly upon the scent of something, he knew not what.

Billy was thoughtful a moment before replying. He was debating how to answer. It would not do to appear too dumb about the matter, he decided.

"I have an eye out for the fair sex, always," he replied. "It's one of my worst failin's. I believe I did see such a piece of calico as you mention."

"Where was it you saw her?"

"Why, it was down the south side a ways, and around a corner into the street next this one. She was comin' toward us, and stopped to speak to a gentleman just before we came up."

"Did you know the man?"

"Don't think we looked at him long enough. We went right on about our biz."

"I thought you acted very cool about it," was the rejoinder to that. "I am the man the lady talked with."

"You! Get out."

"Ha, ha, ha! You are not so wonderfully observing, after all."

"Well, if you say it was you, of course we'll take your word for it," said Billy, "but it's hard to swallow, for we would 'a' knowed you, I should think. But then we didn't hardly glance at the man."

"No matter; I was just joking about not seeing you. I had my eyes more about me than you had, it seems."

"I didn't know but you had some great mystery to spring upon us," remarked Billy, "or some great story to tell us about a woman in black. Now you have knocked it all in the head."

Billy's manner was so open and sincere, that if the Mexican had had any suspicion of anything, it was disarmed.

They talked on for a time, upon nothing in

particular, and then the Mexican, with a glance at his watch, took leave of them and went out.

Billy and Skinny repaired to their room, where they had a lengthy debate over the peculiar turn of affairs. It was their final decision that this Mexican had an ax of some sort to grind, though what it was they could not guess. That he was not just what he seemed, they had proof already, in the fact that the woman in black had called him Miguel.

CHAPTER X.

PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE REWARDED.

NEXT day a veiled woman, not over particular in matters of dress, appeared at the lock-up to see Harrison Waldmar.

She had a note of introduction to somebody in authority, and that note gained her admission without much questioning, and without necessity of showing her face.

She was admitted into the presence of the prisoner, and left with him, the door being locked upon them both, after the usual manner; the prisoner looking the amazement he felt at her appearance.

The visitor did not speak until the door had been locked, and the man had gone away from it.

Then she took another note from under the shawl she had around her, and handed it to Waldmar, with the remark that he was to read it.

This the young man did, and looked at his visitor even more surprised than ever.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he asked.

"It means that your friends want to help you," was the answer.

"And you are here to question me?"

"To hear whatever you will tell."

"Then you have come in vain."

"You don't intend to talk, eh?"

"I have nothing to say."

"Sweet pertaters! won't you say enough to clear yourself, if you are innocent of the crime?"

That exclamation reveals to us who the "woman" was.

It was Broadway Billy, in a disguise we have seen him assume before in the preceding story.

"I can say nothing now, and will say nothing," was the response Billy got to his demand.

"It will be useless for you to question me. I do not want your help at present."

"Well, you are going to have it whether you want it or not, that's flat as a thin griddle-cake," Billy assured.

"But I don't want you to meddle with the case," the prisoner urged. "I want it left alone."

"Can't help what you want; if you are innocent, and won't help yourself, then somebody must help you. Mr. Rentaway thinks you are innocent, and so do I."

"There is plenty of time before my trial comes off."

"Yes; and plenty of time for the real murderer to get away in, too."

The prisoner bit his lip at this.

"That is so," he observed. "That is the only thing that worries me."

Billy was assured of this man's innocence; indeed, he had been almost from the first sure that he was not the guilty one.

"Have you any suspicion who did kill Harry Rentaway?" Billy asked.

"No; not the least," was the straight answer.

"It is more and more of a mystery to me, the more I think of it."

"You seem to have been the only enemy he had."

"I was not his enemy!" was the exclaimed correction. "I was his rival in love, as I have to admit, and we had some hot words; but I would never have done him a wrong like this."

"But you threatened him when you had the quarrel with him?"

"Perhaps I did; I do not remember my words; if so, it was without any real meaning, I assure you."

"And still you refuse to do what you can toward hunting down his murderer, but rather let the rascal have the chance to escape?"

"Nothing of the kind, my young friend. I simply refuse to speak at this time to clear myself. The whole field is open to you, and any one else who is willing to believe my word and hunt further than me for the rascal."

"Yes; but with you a prisoner, under the charge, every eye is upon you, and folks won't look beyond, so long as you don't make the effort to clear yourself of the accusation. A good many believe that you must be the one, and you are in a bad place."

"I care not for what they are mean enough to

think of me. Thank heaven I am well enough known to Mr. Rentaway for him to believe in me."

"Well, there is no use trying to get anything out of you, I see."

"No; there is no use. I will not talk about it."

"Can you suggest anything that will maybe set me on the right track, or give me a clew to work on?"

"No; if I could, I would have mentioned it long ago. I am anxious to see the right man captured, for that will clear me, of course."

"Hasn't the thought come to you that it may not have been a man, but a woman? These women are tough customers, some of them, and they're none too good to do a deed of that sort."

The prisoner reflected.

"No; I do not think of any person of either sex upon whom I can look with suspicion. Harry Rentaway was one of the squarest fellows in this place, and his record was clear and clean. He was never mixed up in any unpleasant musses, and had a character as spotless as any one I ever knew or heard of."

"You certainly don't speak like an enemy, but your action in the affair is more than I am able to get through my thick head."

"It is not necessary that you should understand it. I don't want you to meddle with any of my affairs, young man, understand that. Do all you can toward finding the murderer, but leave my business alone."

"That's as plain as Latin, and a good deal more to the point," observed Billy. "If you say so, of course I'll have to do it, though I am mighty curious to know what your revolver was fired at that time. There's a bullet to be accounted for, Mr. Waldmar, before you will be out of the toils."

"Never mind; I will take care of that. You just leave that part of it alone, and don't meddle with what don't concern you. Now, is there anything else that I can give you information on?"

"I suppose I ought to be satisfied with what I've got already," remarked Billy, sarcastically. "Don't believe I could carry much more."

"Well, I can't help not telling you more than I have. Go ahead and do all you can toward finding the assassin, and if you succeed in running him down I will add to the reward. But leave my personal affairs alone."

"All right! If that's the way of it, why I won't kick any longer. Reckon I won't trouble you again."

"I hope you are not offended, but really I cannot help my silence, my young friend."

"No, I'm not 'fended, but I am sorry fer you. I reckon you'll have to swing."

This shot was a final one, with the hope that it might draw out something by making the prisoner think that he, too, now believed him guilty.

But it had no effect, and Billy called for the attendant and was let out of the place, going away as he had come.

After a long and roundabout course, he finally entered his hotel by the rear way, and was presently in the room once more where he and his skinny partner were domiciled.

He found his lean lieutenant occupied with a singular bit of work, and at first glance could not guess what he was doing.

Before him on the table were a great number of tiny bits of paper, and Skinny was examining them piece by piece.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy called out, "what are you up to now, you young beggar?"

"Git out!" cried Skinny. "No shemales allowed here. I'm too busy to be interrupted."

"But, what are you doin'?" Billy insisted, stepping forward to the table and examining the mess. "Trying to patch up a written docky-mint?"

"You have hit it," Skinny admitted. "I have got a note here that has been torn all to smithereens, and I have got to mend it if it takes all day. There's meat in it or I'm a sinner."

"Where did you get it, thin one?"

"Spent ten minutes fishing it out of every corner of the back yard."

"But who threw it away? That's what I'm tryin' to get at."

"Why, that Mexican fellow, Pablo Costo."

"Sweet pertaters! You don't say so! Skinny, you are worth your weight in sawdust, every day in the week. Let the good work go on, and as soon as I can get out of this toggery I'll help you."

"What luck did you have?"

"None at all. He's mum as a clam."

"Guilty, think you?"

"No; innocent."

"Bully!"

Skinny went on with his task, while Billy laid off his disguise, and in a short time Billy was ready to help him.

"Tell me all about this note," Billy asked, as he set about trying to match the fragments.

"How did you get onto it?"

"Why, I was lounging around in the bar-room, and Pablo was there, and one of these half-naked Indian boys came into the room and handed a note to the landlord. He went off again without a word, and I thought that was the end of it. But, when the landlord had glanced at it, and then called to Mr. Costo and said it was for him, then I was interested, you bet!"

"I should reckon, thin one."

"Well, the Mexican took it and opened it, and it seemed to interest him a good deal. He looked mighty pleased over somethin', and walked the floor with the note in his hand a good while, and finally went out and walked on the piazza the same way. I had an eye on him, without seemin' to have. Pretty soon he tore the note all up, just as you see it, couldn't 'a' tore it any finer if he had tried; and then at the end of the piazza flung it off into the back yard."

"And then you went for it. Bully for you, Skin. I'm goin' to promote you, sure as you have got a name."

"Yes; I went for it, but not right away. I waited till the fellow had gone off, and then out I went, and the way I did scour that back yard was a caution to tom-cats; and here's the result of my scourin'. But hang me if I believe we will ever be able to put it together in the world."

"Sweet pertaters! Skinny, we'll put it together if it takes all the rest of the day. It may not pay us for the trouble, and it may. Anyhow, you bet we are not the chickens to throw it away without seeing what there is in it."

They worked with untiring patience, and the noon hour found them still bending over their task.

At that time they had some of the pieces matched, in patches here and there, but only about a third of the whole lot.

It looked like a gigantic task, and indeed it was, but the lads were determined to master it.

After dinner they tackled it again, and worked at it faithfully till three o'clock, when they had it done. The note was before them, just as it had been read by the Mexican, with only a missing piece here and there.

CHAPTER XI.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

"GIVE us your hand, skeleton pard!" Billy cried joyously.

"Here it is, what there is of it," responded Skinny, cheerfully.

They shook hands, and then embraced and waltzed around the room in their delight.

When they had thus given vent to their feelings in the only way they could, as it seemed, then they went back to the table and looked at the result of their long and hard labor.

There before them lay the note, in hundreds of pieces, but matched carefully, and it read as follows:

"DEAR MIGUEL:-

"I send you this to let you know that I will see you this evening. You cannot imagine how pleased I was to meet you, and how happy I am to know you are still dear to me. Go out this evening, down the street past the place of our meeting, and there I will make myself known to you. I shall be in disguise, for it would never do for me to be recognized. I have much to tell you. Do not fail, if you love me still. Nine o'clock. With fondest love.

"Your ATA."

"What do you think now, Skinny?" Billy asked.

"I think there's a nigger in the fence as big as a house," was the reply.

"Bigger too," declared Billy. "Oh, but we are after something, Skin, and I will bet high on it. If we don't rattle up the dry bones I'm no prophet."

"You bet we will! What a hard case this woman must be. She's got devil enough in her to supply a whole regiment. Wonder what new string this is that she is working?"

"I give it up; but you bet we will find out, or lose a leg tryin'. If we ain't on hand at that meetin' it will be because we can't get there, that's all. Oh, but the fever has got me now the worst way. You are a jewel, Skinny, for going for this note, and I don't care who knows it."

"But, what is this Mexican to that woman, Billy? And what is he sailin' under false colors

for? Them's p'inters that I'd like ter have made clear to me."

"Give it up, tender plant. Don't let it worry you, but wait with patience for the coming of the appointed hour, and then we'll see."

For them the remainder of the afternoon dragged wearily enough.

They met the Mexican in the bar-room and on the piazza, and they could see by his actions that he was at loss how to kill the time.

They took care not to let him suspect that he had any interest for them, and their remarks to him, when they passed any, were of the most commonplace sort.

Toward night an old man, a Mexican as any one could tell by a glance at him, came into the hotel and registered.

When he had been shown to his room, Billy made it his business to take a peep at the register.

The name he had inscribed there was Don Alva Paso.

Billy gave Skinny the wink that it was their man, the detective, and after awhile the boys had business in their room.

They had not been there long when there was a light tap at the door, and the door being opened, in stepped Mr. Ferret, in his disguise, as he had promised to appear ere long.

Billy closed the door, turned the key in the lock, and then shook hands with the detective.

The conversation that followed was in low tones that could not possibly be overheard.

"Well, you see I am here as I promised," the detective remarked.

"And you're as welcome as the flowers of spring, too," responded Billy.

"You seem to be glad to see me. Is it possible that you have news for me so soon?"

"I should smile if it wasn't! We have yanked the biggest old persimmon of the whole lot, and the skeleton in the closet is out for a holiday. You hit the nail right on the head when you fixed your eye on Clever-so-clever, and he's your mutton, sure!"

"Indeed? Tell me all about it. You have done more, and in shorter time than I would have believed possible."

Billy narrated the events that had occurred, so far as they interested this man.

"You are a trump!" the detective complimented. "Give me your hand, my lad. I do not wonder at your enjoying the reputation you do. Now we will arrest this man, as soon as possible, and—"

"Just put on the breaks right there!" interrupted Billy, with a wave of the hand. "Hold your hosses, as it were. There's another mare's nest that has got to be looked into before we go off and spoil everything. That woman is the pizzenest critter of the whole pizzen lot of 'em."

"Why, what else has she been up to?"

"That's what we don't know yet, but we are going to find out to-night, or bust a buckle."

"What do you mean? You have interested me more than a little."

"Well, we're willing to let you in on the ground floor with us, but if we do, it is with the understanding that we are to boss the business. It's our puddin', and we want to do the dishin'."

"Oh, I agree to that. The only thing I ask for myself is that you will do nothing that will enable my rascals to give me the slip."

"Trust us for that," said Billy. "We're no chickens, Mr. Ferret."

"I can well believe that."

Billy went ahead then, and laid everything out for the inspection of the insurance detective.

When he had done, he and Skinny were complimented again.

"Never mind compliments," waived Billy; "they are likely to sour on the stummick if a fellow takes in too many. Just tell us what you think of the business all the way round."

"I can't help complimenting where it is deserved," was the response. "Good luck has helped you, we can't deny; but it is the way you have taken advantage of every chance, that has counted. Why, your work on this torn message is a thing that would have made a veteran tear his hair."

"Sweet pertaters! I felt like yankin' out my own," Billy cried. "And as for Skinny, I'll bet he lost flesh."

"And now you want my opinion further, eh?"

"Jest as far as you can reach," assured Billy.

"Well, then, it is that you should go ahead just as you have planned. I will lie back and take it easy, and let you have all the glory that comes of it. If I see a chance to chip in and help, I'll do it."

"Good enough! And if you get a pointer on that murder case, don't fail to grip it. That case is dragging behind the procession."

"I agree with you. That promises to be a stubborn affair. I will keep my eyes open for you. And now I will leave you, for I must take care not to let it be known that I am not what I seem."

"I'll take a squint out and see if the coast is clear," announced Billy, "and if it is you can scoot."

He unlocked the door and took a survey of the hall, and there being no one around, the detective slipped out and went to his own room.

When Billy turned back into the room he found Skinny with an exceedingly long face.

"Hello! got your wet blanket on, have you?"

"I think it's about time there was a damper of some sort put on," muttered the lean lieutenant.

"Why, what's the matter now?" asked Billy.

"Don't you think you've trusted this man too far?"

"No further than he trusted me with his business, Skin."

"Maybe not; but, suppose he fools us, and gets around us and scoops that big reward?"

"I don't believe he'd try it, my son, and it wouldn't be healthy for him if he did, you can bet on that."

"What could you do, after it was done?"

"I believe I'm big enough to take satisfaction out of his hide, if it was to come to that, that's one thing I could do. But, there's no danger, and your fears are groundless."

"You don't know that, though. He may be a deeper man than we figure on, and for all we can tell, may have had a hand in the murder himself!"

"Oh! get out! You are batty in the upper story, Skinny. There's no such thing the matter with him."

"You don't know it. I tried to get your eye to make you stop onwinding to him, but it was no use, and now he knows as much as we know ourselves."

"Yes, I saw you drawing all sorts of mugs at me," admitted Billy, "but I was deaf in one ear and couldn't see out of the other. Let me lay some pearls of logic out before you."

"Well, what is it?"

"You see, we have brought this case to a focus for him, almost. If I kept anything back, it ought to have been that fact. Having let that out, it was necessary to go further and impress him with the necessity of letting his case hang fire for a time till we could see what else is to follow. See?"

"I hope it's all right. I wouldn't 'a' done it, that's all I've got to say about it."

"Well, now that you have made me make a speech, just take off your wet blanket and put on your smiling face once more. It gives me the creeps to see you goin' around lookin' so sad."

"Why does it?"

"Why, you're so thin you make me think of death's-heads, grave-yards, and all such stuff."

Skinny made a kick at him, and they fell into their horse-play for a time, till Skinny was brightened up a little.

About that time came a knock at their door again.

Opening it, there stood Cleverdale Finck.

"How d'e do?" Billy greeted, cheerfully: "come right in."

The young insurance agent entered, smiling as ever, and took a seat.

"You boys seem to be having some fun all by yourselves," he remarked. "You evidently miss the ranch life, where you had more room to vent your spirits."

"Oh, we were only having a little frolic," declared Billy. "You see, I had bet Skinny that he couldn't jump through my hands faster than I could open and shut them, but he's so thin he won every time. Can't hold him any more than you could hold the tail end of a shadow of nothing."

"No, I suppose not," the agent laughed. "I thought I'd drop in on you and ask what you thought of Mr. Ferret when you saw him. What sort of detective do you take him to be? and what of his case? Wasn't that the weakest thing yet?"

"I should say so," Billy sneered. "There was no case at all, and any one could see that. I wouldn't monkey my time away on it, and I hope he's had the good sense to drop it by this time. He didn't impress me very strong, anyhow."

Mr. Finck looked gratified, if not actually relieved. He seemed satisfied that these younger ferrets were not trying to worm anything out of the case.

When he went away, it was with the belief that he had done a clever piece of playing. Billy and Skinny had a good laugh after he had departed.

CHAPTER XII.

SKINNY HAS THE LAUGH ON BILLY.

THE New York delegates had work to do. And they were awake to the importance of it, too.

Some time after supper, and when night was about at hand, they set out from their hotel for another stroll.

They went off leisurely, paying no attention to any one, and aimed for out of the town on the north side, with a definite purpose in view.

By the time they were out of the city, or nearly so, it was quite dark, and when they came to a stop it was in a lonesome place, where they were not likely to be discovered.

Here they proceeded to make changes in their appearance.

When they had done, no one, unless by close inspection, would have taken them to be the same fellows.

Billy was a darky, as dark as the darkest, while Skinny, with a white beard, and walking with a crooked back, was an aged man.

They were in a gully, and had lighted their work with the use of matches now and again, and when they were finally done, they both struck matches for mutual inspection.

Both enjoyed a quiet laugh.

"Golly!" exclaimed Billy, "I reckon yo' is de granddad to Noah, ain't yo'?"

"Young man," spoke Skinny, in excellent imitation of an old man, "do not jest with a man of my years."

"Wouldn't t'ink ob doin' sich a t'ing," declared Billy. "If you is old 'cordin' in p'portion as yo' is thin, old 'Thuselah would be a boy to yo'."

"And if you are sinful within in any similar degree as you are black without," returned Skinny, in cracked and measured tone, "the Old Boy would be a saint compared to you."

Both laughed quietly, and their matches went out.

"Well, now for it," said Billy.

"And we'll be in time, won't we?"

"Yes, we've got half an hour and a little more. Twenty minutas will see us on the spot."

"Good enough! Let's be off, and if we can do as well on this lay as we did last night, I won't kick. We'll git thar, you bet."

They made their way out of the gully, where on another occasion they had so nearly met their death, and were soon once more on the streets of Santo Fe.

There they parted company, with the intention of getting to the appointed place of meeting in as short a time as possible.

Billy made haste, but when he finally reached the street where the woman had appointed the meeting with the mysterious Mexican, he found that Skinny had anticipated him.

Skinny was there, an aged man, and was begging alms of every one who passed by.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed, "but that little snoozer is a good one, and no discountin' that fact."

Billy went on down toward where the lean lieutenant was standing, and at his approach Skinny held out his hand with a melancholy whine.

"Help a poor old man," he implored. "Give me a trifle that will help me to get a bite to eat and a place to sleep. My days ain't many more, and I'll be numbered with the majority."

"Git out, yo' ol' duffer!" cried Billy, playfully.

"If yo' had saved when yo' was young yo' wouldn't be heah now. Dat's what I is tryin' to do, sah, an' yo' git nuffin' out ob me, yo' jes' bet yo' boots yo' don't."

"How do I do it?" Skinny asked in whisper, as no one was near.

"Bully!" Billy complimented. "It's a good idee. Keep it up, if you want to. Ha! here's our 'sitemon'."

Billy indicated the direction with an inclination of the head, and immediately moved on, as the Mexican, Pablo Costo, was leisurely approaching.

Billy passed him, face to face, and gave him every chance to recognize him if he could, but the man no more than merely glanced at him, keeping straight on his way.

In a moment more he was where Skinny was stationed.

"Have mercy on a poor old man," Skinny whined, putting out his lean hand.

"Get out, mendigo!" the Mexican snapped.

Skinny drew back immediately, without further parley.

The disguised Billy paused and smiled to see that Skinny's make-up had stood the test.

"The fellow hasn't the least idee who we are," he said to himself. "And now let the female part of the combination appear as soon as she wants to."

He moved on in the direction of the Lodgelaw house, and was passing the corner when he saw a figure emerge from a side gate, as on the other occasion.

It was the figure of a woman, as before, and this time that of an aged woman, bent and feeble; but Billy had no doubt as to her identity.

She moved down the street in the direction in which the Mexican had gone, Billy following at safe distance.

Skinny, after the Mexican had passed, had crossed to the other side, and was now out of sight.

Billy kept his eyes upon the woman, following carefully, and finally she came up to the Mexican, when she put her arm in his without a word.

Pablo Costo did not seem in any wise surprised, and the pair went on from that point as though they had come arm in arm a long distance.

Billy kept a lookout for Skinny, but the thin partner was not to be discovered.

Why he had disappeared, and where he had gone, Billy could not imagine.

"Some new thought must have popped into his head, I reckon," Billy mused. "I can trust Skinny, anyhow, no matter what is going on. My business is to see what is to be found out here."

He pressed on after the pair, keeping them in sight, but taking extra precaution against being discovered following them.

In the mean time Skinny had made a move that was not looked for by Billy, who was not into the secret.

Getting away from the scene as speedily as possible, he had dodged around a near corner, where a waiting carriage was standing.

It was a box-seat vehicle, with a fall top, and intended for two persons.

Into this Skinny got, with all haste, and in a moment more was curled up under the seat, where there was just room enough for one of his meager bulk, with little to spare.

A word of explanation will make everything clear in this connection. Arriving in the neighborhood before Billy, Skinny had seen the Mexican drive up in the carriage, tie the horse, and walk away in the direction of the Lodgelaw residence.

It was after he had gone that Skinny had followed for a distance and taken up his stand in the way he must return, playing the beggar. He had been there but a few minutes when Billy appeared, and the return of the Mexican so soon, hindered Skinny from telling Billy anything.

Billy now kept on, as described, and presently, coming around the corner to the point where the carriage stood, saw the pair stop, and in a moment more get into the vehicle and drive off.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed. "Here's a pretty go! This is something I didn't figure on. How the merry deuce am I going to follow them now, I wonder? If that lony pard of mine hadn't gone off so sudden— But that wouldn't help matters any, I don't believe. There's only one thing to be done, and that is, I have got to play boy again and catch on behind, as I have done many a time before."

Crossing the street, he ran speedily forward, after the carriage, and choosing the darkest place he was likely to find, darted out into the road and caught hold behind.

The man and woman were talking, in low tones, but Billy's running hindered him from catching their words to any extent.

Presently a corner was turned, where it was quite light, and where a number of children were at play.

What Billy had dreaded, the moment he heard the chatter of these youngsters, came to pass.

Espying him, they raised a shout to the driver of the vehicle, telling him to "Cut behind! cut behind!"

The Mexican looked around, and the next moment down came his whip, full force across Billy's back, causing him to let go with a howl of pain.

"Sweet per—Lan' ob goodness!" he cried, almost coming out with his pet exclamation, but switching it off to something else. "What yo' done hit me like dat fo?" he demanded. "I wouldn't hurt yo' blame ol' go-cart, would I?"

"You try catching on behind again, if you dare," the Mexican shouted back, "and I'll hurt you worse than I did that time!"

Seeing that it was useless to follow further, without a change of disguise, and well knowing that the carriage would be out of sight before he could make a change, Billy fell out of the race, disgusted.

"More proof that I am a know-nothin'!" he muttered to himself, as he hurried beyond the hearing of the jeers of the children who had caused his misfortune. "I believe I will go and bag my head, and then hire somebody to kick me. Wish I could get hold of Skinny now, and I'd take it out of his hide, maybe."

This thought was some relief to his feelings, though of course he did not mean that he would do it, literally.

He was retracing his steps the way he had come, hoping to find Skinny, and pretty soon thought he saw him just ahead, coming toward him.

"I'd as lief take another lickin' as to have Skinny find out what's happened; sweet pertaters, yes! I'd never hear the last of it, sure. Bet if he ever finds it out he won't get it by me. But, hello! it ain't Skin."

Now that the person was nearer, he could see this, and the next moment he recognized who it was.

It was the insurance detective, in his disguise. "What!" the latter exclaimed, "off the track so soon?"

"Yes; he tumbled to me, and I dropped out of the race," Billy owned.

"Your disguise is a good one," the detective complimented. "I would not have penetrated it, if I hadn't overheard you and your partner's whispered words."

"You overheard?"

"Yes."

"Where were you?"

"I was near enough to hear."

"Well, this case has flunked, anyhow. Wonder where that walking skeleton went off to. Did you see where he went?"

"Yes; he is in that carriage, under the seat. The cake is not all dough yet, not by a good deal."

"Sweet pertaters!"

Billy managed to say that much, but got no further just then.

"Your partner is a good one, and no mistake," observed the man. "If you wait around here you will probably fall in with him when the carriage comes back."

"Yes, I s'pose so. I'll stay. If I had wings though, I'd take flight for New York instead. Don't ask me why; you didn't answer my question a minute ago. I'm not as great as I was."

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT SKINNY OVERHEARD.

In the mean time Skinny was in clover.

Once under the seat of the carriage, he was all right.

It was not likely that he would be discovered, unless by some unlooked-for mishap.

When the couple had got in, and the carriage started off, then he felt secure enough, and was congratulating himself and wondering what Billy would think of his disappearance.

Being so close to the pair on the seat, he could hear all they said.

"May we talk now?" asked the woman, when they were settled down and moving along the street.

"Yes, Ata, we may talk now," was the response. "We cannot be too careful, and I thought this was about the surest means of not being overheard."

"You are right. There is no danger that any one will hear us. And now tell me about yourself, Miguel, and what it is brings you here. Tell me again that you do not bate me for what I did."

"Hate you! I love you, I will ever love you. You were proud, and I was as poor as I well could be. I cannot blame you that you married that old man and his money. I suppose it was the woman nature in you, or at any rate your nature."

"But I never loved him, Miguel; believe me in this. I never loved any but you, never shall love any but you. He was rich, and could not live many years. Then I planned to offer myself to you, rich, and be happy in your love. But my hopes were dashed to the ground."

"How was that? Tell me everything."

"I will. I learned that his wealth was his only while he lived; that at his death I would be a beggar, so far as any of his money would ever help me. I cursed the hour that made me his wife."

"Well, that was a set-back, truly. But what

is this about insurance? What is the plan that you have on foot in regard to that?"

"Ah! that was a thought, a glorious thought! I am playing a role you little suspect, little can suspect. There is nothing—"

"Cut behind! Cut behind!"

Loudly rung out the interrupting cry, and the Mexican glanced over his shoulder to learn what it meant.

What happened then has been told.

"Confound his impudence!" the Mexican muttered, as he turned again to the fore, "I ought to have given him more than I did."

"Who was it?" the woman asked, in some alarm.

"Oh, only a common nigger."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Didn't you see for yourself?"

"Yes; but I am nervous. Do you think he heard—"

"No, no! And even if he did, he wouldn't be able to put it together to make anything out of it. Don't let that worry you."

"What were you saying, Miguel, dear?"

Skinny's ears were set at full cock, taking in every word. What a dashing widow this must be! was his thought.

"You were talking, Ata," was the answer. "You were about to tell me of that insurance scheme."

"Oh, yes, so I was. Well, it is a darling plot, as I am sure you will agree with me; and when I tell you that it was all owing to my love for you that I have done it, you will see that my heart has never been false to you, no, not for a moment has it been false to you!"

"I am willing to believe you, Ata, for I love you as woman was never loved before. Go on and tell me everything."

"I will, I will. When I learned the truth regarding old Lodgelaw's money, I was in despair. I saw that I had thrown myself away for nothing, as I believed. But almost at the same time a young insurance agent came here and hung out his shingle, and the idea came to me to have the old dotard insured. I became the most loving and affectionate creature you ever heard of."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, you well may laugh. Why, my genuine love and showing of affection for you, could not half come up to the way I played love with him. I could twist him around my fingers at will. Presently I mentioned insurance to him, showing him that I was unprovided for in case he died—though I could not bear the thought of that! and off he went and was insured for a big amount."

"A wonder they accepted a man so old."

"You have not heard the half yet, dear Miguel. That part of the scheme by itself would be unworthy a woman of any intellect whatever. Any common mortal could think that far, and perhaps might profit by it; but I went further and made the matter doubly sure. I put myself in the way of this agent, flirted with him, got him to fall in love with me, and then when it was all ripe, made a proposal to him that ought to have made his hair stand on end—but it didn't."

"I begin to see. Curse him! I hate him!"

"A sure sign that you do love me, Miguel. But do not let jealousy ruin my plan, now that it is sure to succeed. He wanted me to elope with him, deserting old Lodgelaw, and I agreed. Then, as though a new thought had come to me, I proposed that we insure Lodgelaw for a big amount, let him die, and then have the money to sport upon and have a good time. And he agreed."

"Ha! Then it was you who put him out of the way."

"No, no! You are wrong there, Miguel. Not but that it might have been done, soon enough, but it wasn't done. He died of natural causes. You see the doctor was bribed, and he was liable to die at any moment when he was insured. It was something the matter with his heart; this is the truth, believe me."

"All right, I'll take your word on that point."

"But don't you approve of my work? Don't you think it immense? Now we shall soon have the money in our hands, and then—happiness!"

"Oh! it certainly is a fine scheme, and I think you have done nobly; but I can't enthuse over it as I would have done some time ago."

"Why, how is that?" in some surprise.

"Because I am rich myself now."

"Rich?"

"Immensely rich, I assure you."

"Explain. It is almost too good to be true."

"Easily done. The last of the Mendez family is dead, and I am the sole heir. I could buy the half of this Territory."

"Oh! such news, such good news!"

"You see this little scheme of yours pales into insignificance."

"Yes, so it does. If I had only known—But, perhaps you will not desire me, now that you know me so well—know that money is one of my gods?"

"Res. easy upon that point, Ata. I love you, love you as well as though no shadow had come between us. There is only one thing that I can ask, and there seems now to be something in the way of that."

"Ask what you will, Miguel."

"It is that you go with me to Mexico within a day or two."

"Oul! would that I could—would that I dared do it! To run away would give the insurance people good grounds against me, and investigation then might lead to discovery of fraud, and—and it might imprison me!"

"I see all that as well as you do, but just as soon as you get hold of this money I want you to cut loose from that agent and come to Mexico."

"I will do that, gladly will I do that! He can whistle for me, as soon as I get the money in my grasp. Then I shall be safe, for he dare not say a word, and the company will be out of the race."

No need to say that Skinny was all ears. He was storing this away with care, making sure of every point as fast as they came to him.

"When are you going back?" the woman asked.

"I would go at once, were it not for one thing."

"What is that?"

"The murder that has been done here. For a stranger to leave suddenly after that, might turn suspicion against him. I don't want any of that in mine!"

"No, I should say not. But after a few days it will be all right, and then I suppose you will be off. Oh! how I wish I could go with you! My heart has been with you all this time."

"Come to me as soon as possible, that is all I can say. Just as soon as you get the money, or as soon as it is safe, come."

"I will, I will."

"And in the mean time take care to let no one know that Miguel Mendez has been here. It would be ruin to me, in a certain direction."

"I will take care of that. But, there is no one whom I would mention it to, and no one will ever know of this meeting but ourselves. When our interview comes to an end, I must get out of the carriage and you must leave me to go home alone."

"Yes; but I will take you nearly there. We have gone far enough to turn now, I suppose. One kiss, before we go back, old woman!"

"Old woman! Ha, ha, ha! Yes, take a dozen if you will."

By the sounds that followed, Skinny believed the measure was being filled up to the full number, with perhaps a few over.

After that the vehicle was turned, and the ride back into town was begun, the conversation running on much as before.

"Why is it that you do not want it known that you have been here, Miguel?" the woman presently asked, after a brief pause.

"I cannot tell you that now," was the answer. "Believe me, it is important, and must not be known."

"You are stopping at the very hotel where that murder was done."

"Yes, that is so; and I was there at the time when the crime was committed. If I went in a hurry, as I have said, suspicion might fall upon me."

"But you could prove your innocence, of course?"

"I guess it would be a hard matter for them to prove me guilty; but, I want nothing to do with it. You can see how it would be, or I should say how it would have been. It was my intention to leave the town that same day. Suppose I had gone suddenly about the time the crime was done—Ugh!"

"It was fortunate that nothing of the kind happened."

"More fortunate than you dream of," was the response. "I tell you it must not be known, positively must not be known, that Miguel Mendez has been here in Santa Fe."

"It will never be known through me, be sure of that."

From that point their talk was mainly a repetition of what had already passed, more in detail, and interspersed with a good deal of love-talk and nonsense.

At last the carriage stopped and the woman

got out, and the Mexican lost no time then in getting the rig back to the place where he had hired it.

Finally that place was reached, the man sprung out, paid the bill and went off, and the horse was taken out.

When Skinny heard the feet of the animal sounding on the stable floor, as it was led away, he slipped out from his place of hiding and put distance between that locality and himself as speedily as he could.

CHAPTER XIV.

SUSPICION AWAKENED.

"GREAT ginger!" Skinny exclaimed to himself.

This was when he paused, after his sudden flight from the stable.

"I wonder where I'll find that Billy now?" he questioned. "I want to see him bad."

As there was no one to answer the question for him, he had to trust to his own powers of guessing.

"Mebby he is where I left him," he thought, "for it is certain that he didn't follow the carriage any further— Ha, ha, ha!"

At the recollection of that "cut behind" episode, the lean lieutenant had to laugh heartily. It had tickled him through and through, and he was not likely to get over it right away.

"I'll amble around that way, anyhow," he decided. "If I don't see him there, I'll know he must be at the hotel. I'll off with this disguise though, for there's no use wearing it any longer that I can see."

It was but a little work for him to do this, and he went on as Skinny the Lean, in proper person.

"Yes; I must see Billy as soon as possible," he decided. "for I must unload to somebody or bust. All that information I took in is liable to congest my brain, if I don't get rid of some of it soon. Can't carry such a load as that long, and retain my even temper. I'm too thin, as Billy would say."

A short walk brought him into the neighborhood he aimed for, and a short hunt around disclosed Billy.

He had not yet removed the black from his face, having no opportunity, not knowing how soon Skinny would return, and not wanting to miss him.

He was leaning against a fence when Skinny came upon him, and looking rather cast down.

Skinny went up quietly, gave him a poke in the ribs, and exclaimed:

"Cut behind, Billy!"

Instantly Billy's arm swung around, with a stiff switch in his grasp, and Skinny received a stinging cut across the lean legs that made him wince.

"Yes, I'll cut behind," Billy responded. "How do you like it? I expected you would say jest that, and I was ready for you."

"That's the meanest thing you ever did in your life," Skinny complained.

"Thought I'd let you know how it feels, so it wouldn't seem so awful funny to you. That was one on me, I admit, Skin; but I want to nip it right in the bud, so's you won't bring it up forever. See?"

"I see," Skinny answered. "You'll see, too, if you do that again. I'll get mad and walk into you, see if I don't! But, come; let's get to the house as soon as we can, for I've got more information aboard than I can carry."

"What have you found out?"

"Can't tell you here; it would take a half-hour."

"Any p'ints in it?"

"There's millions in it, Billy!"

"Got onto anything about the Mexican?"

"You bet! Oh, if he ain't a bad one, and if that woman ain't a worse one, then you can kick me fer a Kickapoo."

"Why?"

"Why! Wait till I tell you. That scene last night didn't half show what a terror she is."

"Well, then, let's get there as soon as we can."

"How about your blackened face?"

"I'll take the chance of smugglin' in th' back way."

"All right, and hope we won't be seen, not by that Mex, anyhow. He might 'spect somethin', seein' it was a nig that was after his wagon."

"That's so; but we'll try it. Don't know where else we could go, unless away out to that old witch's cabin, and that's too far."

Their minds made up on the point in question, they set out for their hotel at once.

Arriving there, they went around and entered by the rear way.

Billy had wiped a good deal of the black from his face, and hoped by making haste through

the hall, to gain his room without being detected.

Skinny went ahead, and the first thing he did was to turn the light partly down, which was likely to favor Billy all the more.

He, Skinny, had gained the door of their room, and Billy was coming, when suddenly another door opened and a glare of light flashed out, falling full upon the half-blackened young detective.

And in the door, in the midst of the glare, was the Mexican!

He was coming out, but at sight of Billy he stopped short. And then, as he noted the black on him, reached out his hand and caught him by the shoulder.

"Ha! what merry lark have you been up to?" he demanded playfully, wheeling Billy around facing him.

"Only having a little innocent fun," was the response. "Got any 'bjections to it? If ye haven't jest remove yer hook from quarter-deck, an' I'll sail on."

"You have been up to some sort of mischief, I'll bet," laughed the Mexican, as he let him go. "Or maybe," he added, "you have been trying your hand at detective work."

"Detective work be hanged!" growled Billy. "When I get back to New York, if the Fool Killer don't get in his fine work on me before I do, I'm going to get a situation as dish-washer in a Bowery hash-house; I think the caliber of my intellect will just fit me for that sort of work."

The Mexican laughed, and they passed on their ways, but no sooner had the Mexican turned than a cloud came over his face.

"Cascaras!" he hissed, "was the young hound following me? If I thought he was, I'd— But he didn't learn anything, he couldn't learn anything. I shall look out for him."

Billy had gone right on and followed Skinny into the room.

"Kick me, and kick me hard, partner," Billy requested, as soon as the door had been closed.

Skinny, remembering the blow from the whip which Billy had laid on his legs, did not wait for a second invitation, but sent his foot to meet Billy's person with considerable force.

"Thank you; now I feel better," Billy remarked, quietly. "It was what I deserved, only a good deal more of it."

"What are ye findin' fault with yerself about now?"

"I'm sorry I was born a fool."

"So am I; but that don't alter th' facts of th' case any. What particular bit of foolishness is it that is grievin' you?"

"That I ever run the risk of comin' in here with this black on me. I ought to be taken out and tied to a mule's tail and kicked to death. Why, I ought to have gone ten miles, if necessary, to get cleaned up before comin' here. Now he will have an eye of suspicion on us, and it will be hard to play the spotter on him."

"And it's too bad, for that's what's got to be done. He's a bad one, I tell you. But, let me unload my cargo, so's you kin understand what I'm talkin' about."

"Wait till I wash up. That won't take long, and it will be done with."

Billy set about the task immediately, and was soon himself once more and ready for his thin partner's revelation.

Skinny went ahead and told all he had heard, with an attention to details that proved his memory to be good.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy cried, when he had heard all. "This yanks the tart, sure pop."

Their conversation was in such tones that no one out of the room could overhear.

"Just what I think myself," assented Skinny; "and that woman is the Tartar of the whole batch. She's a terror!"

"Terror! That is no name for her. Skinny, if my old mother wasn't a woman, I'd hate the whole tribe of 'em worse'n p'izen; I couldn't help it."

"They ain't all bad, that's one blessin'," Skinny responded. "This one is evil enough to make up for a good many of 'em. But, we'll bring her up with a round turn, I'm thinkin'."

Just then came a light tapping at their window.

They looked at each other in some surprise. The tapping was repeated.

"What's that?" whispered Skinny.

"You know as much about it as I do," answered Billy.

Without hesitation he leaned over toward the table and blew out the light, plunging the room in darkness.

That done, he went to the window and drew back the curtain, peering out to see if any

person was there, as he naturally supposed there must be.

Yes, there in the dim light was the outlines of a man, and as the curtain was pulled aside the man motioned for the window to be raised. Billy took a revolver from his belt, and then obeyed.

The window lifted a little, the man took hold under it and ran it up silently as possible, and dropped into the room.

"Don't be alarmed," he whispered, "it's only Ferret."

"Guess we're not frightened very bad," assured Billy. "You would have had a fight for it if you had meant harm."

"If I had meant harm I could have done it without coming in," was the answer. "When in a lighted room, my lads, don't sit with your shadow on the curtain. It gives an enemy too good a target."

"Never thought of it!" cried Billy. "No matter, seein' that we haven't any enemy to be popping away at us. Much obliged for the pointer just the same."

"Don't be too sure about that. Detectives always have enemies, more or less, and it's often more."

"But, what's the reason you didn't come by the hallway?"

"Eyes are around. A man has been trying to listen at your door, but has gone away disgusted, I guess."

"Sweet pertaters! Is that so? Well, he's welcome to all he heard; eh, Skinny?" He re-lighted the lamp.

"I should say so," the thin partner returned.

"Who was it?" asked Billy.

"The Mexican."

"I thought so. I have got it in for him, and he wants to look out. We have got more points now, Mr. Ferret."

"May I come in for a share of them?"

"If Skinny is willin'," answered Billy. "It is his findings, and he has one eye on you with some suspicion already."

Billy eyed the man keenly as he said this; the detective smiled, and Skinny grew red.

"I guess he may safely trust me," the detective remarked. "Suspicion is a good thing not to be out of, however."

The facts were laid bare, and the trio held a long consultation about the matter.

It was understood that this Mexican, Pablo Costo, or Miguel Mendez, was guilty of some crime, and that he must be watched. What the crime was they could not tell yet.

Finally the detective took his leave, going back the way he had come, and when Billy and Skinny had made door and window doubly secure, they sought their bed for the rest of the night.

CHAPTER XV.

COMING AT THE TRUTH.

THE work of the next day, for Billy and Skinny, was to allay suspicion, if possible to do so.

The Mexican seemed purposely to put himself in their way, but they paid no more attention to him than to anybody else; in fact not as much.

Nor had they need to. There were other eyes upon this man, the eyes of the keen-scented insurance detective. He had put himself to this part of the work, leaving the New York pards free.

Once, when opportunity offered, Billy engaged the landlord in conversation, when the Mexican could overhear all that was said.

In the confab Billy gave it as his opinion that Waldmar must be guilty. He didn't see how any one else could be suspected, with the proof against him so positively.

The landlord could not get around the proof, but hated to think it was so. He had known Waldmar too long and too well, and he was of the same opinion as Mr. Rentaway, that he was not the guilty man.

All the talk, of course, was for the benefit of the Mexican.

The idea had struck Billy, and he had kept the thought to himself, that possibly he knew something about it.

Billy made it his business, when the opportunity was favorable, to pay a visit to Mr. Rentaway.

He found the old gentleman looking even more aged and worn.

"Have you learned anything?" was the eager demand.

"I suspect something," was Billy's answer.

"What is it?"

"I must ask questions first."

"Very well, ask them. Anything to bring

this awful thing to an end. I must see the murderer arrested."

"Then you still believe in the innocence of Waldmar?"

"I do, firmly. That boy never killed my Harry; never! It would be hard for me to believe it, had there been eye-witnesses to the crime."

"And I agree with you yet, though you may hear that I have said otherwise. I have said so, but for a purpose. I have been told that you used to live in Mexico."

"Yes, that is true. I married there, and my boy was born there."

"Do you know anything about a Mendez family down there?"

"Heavens!"

"What's the matter, sir?"

"That was the name of my wife!"

"The merry deuce it was! Have I struck 'ile already?"

"My wife's name was Dona Elena Mendez; she was a belle of the Mexican capital."

"Sweet pertaters! I'm gettin' thar, sure as land and water make mud! Bet I can lay my finger on the man who killed your son."

The bereaved father sprang up and caught Billy by the shoulders.

"Tell me his name, lad," he cried. "Tell me who he is. Let me see his face, only once, and—"

"And you'd get yourself into trouble by taking the law into your own hands. No, sir; you don't get me to tell."

"What! Would you shield the murderer of my son from justice? Tell me who he is, lad, or it will be worse for you! I will shake it out of you!"

"Hold your hosses now, and cool off a bit," suggested the composed Billy. "You can't shake it out of me, for it don't lie so near the surface as that. Let me unwind in my own way."

"But, Weston, the murderer of my boy is at large!"

"What if he is? We have our eyes on him, and he can't get out of this town. Let him try it on, that's all."

"Well, well, what is it you know? Tell me soon as you can, for this awful suspense is killing me. Why was Harry shot down in that cowardly way? What had he done? Are you going to tell me something that will leave a stain on his memory?"

"Nixey!" Billy cried. "His record is clean, far as I know. I want you to tell me why he was killed."

"Would to heaven that I knew!"

"You say your wife was a Mendez."

"Yes; she was."

"And then your son had Mendez blood in his veins."

"To be sure; and proud he might be of it, though there are some who disgrace the name."

"Did you ever hear of a Miguel Mendez?"

"Certainly; a very wealthy man, very old, and in fact almost the last of his line."

"Good, gooder, goodest! We are gettin' thar, Eli, with both feet. But this isn't the one I mean. Isn't there a younger Miguel Mendez?"

"I believe there was—yes, there was. I never saw him though, and certainly never heard any good of him. He ought to be a man of thirty to thirty-five, if I do not mistake."

"He is about that age, somewhere, and is mighty rich, accordin' to his own tell. I take it he has come into the old man's shoes."

"What! Is old Mendez dead?"

"That's about it."

"Then my boy—"

"Your boy what?"

"It is too late now; it comes too late."

"What comes too late? Would he have come in for a share of that money?"

"Yes; and undoubtedly a good slice of it, too; but it is idle to talk about that!"

"Sweet pertaters!" cried Billy, and jumping up, he caught hold of the corners of his coat and began to execute a quickstep.

"Zounds!" cried the old gentleman, "have you no feelings? Don't you know the body of my dead son lies in the next room? Shall I throw you out of door?"

"Your pardon, sir," said Billy immediately, and in earnest tone. "I should not have acted so; but I am overcome with the success of our hunt for the murderer. I have him now, sure."

"Who is he?"

"Miguel Mendez, as sure as shootin'."

"But can you prove it? Why should he kill my boy— By heavens!"

"Ha! you grasp it now, do you?" said Billy. "I thought you would, sir. You see how it was."

"I do, I do. He must be the last of the line, and with Harry out of the way, the whole estate would be his. Oh! the knave, the knave!"

"That's what he is, and worse," Billy agreed. "But we have got him where the hair is short, you bet, and if we don't make him squeal, it will be funny. But we have got to trap him."

"Then you can't prove what you assert."

"Not yet; but it will come. I've done it before, and I guess I can do it again. Nothin' suits me better."

"But where is he? Who is he? Where is he hiding? I must know, I tell you I will know! I must get at him, and—"

"There now, there now, I tell you it won't do," Billy broke in. "You shall not do anything to spoil the game, if I can help it. You must be patient. I know how you feel, but you would spoil everything if I put you on his track."

"Yes, yes, I suppose you are right; but it is hard to sit here doing nothing, and my poor boy unavenged."

"We'll get around to that all in good time. I have told you that the man is being watched, and he can't get away even if he wants to."

"But isn't there a chance that you may be mistaken? Perhaps you are raising my hopes only to dash them to the ground and leave me in worse despair than ever. Have a care, Weston, how you—"

"Oh! I'm pretty sure of my ground," assured Billy, "or I wouldn't have let out what I have. There is a chance to be mistaken, of course, but it is dollars to cents that I'm not. To-night will tell the tale, however, if nothin' busts."

"What is going to be done to-night?"

"We must lay plans and trap the whole kit an' b'lin' of 'em."

"Why, are there more than this villain concerned?"

"Are there! Why, Mr. Rentaway, there's the p'izenest old nest of vipers you ever heard of in your life!"

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. You are goin' to hear somethin' that will make your ears ring, before twenty-four hours more, if I am any prophet. Right here in this town of Santa Fe is the worst old scheme you ever thought of; and I'm goin' to stick a splinter into it and bust it, you bet!"

"Young man, you are a riddle to me. I can't understand you. But I have confidence in you, and so you may direct me to do what you will."

"That's the idee; and you can trust me to bring this thing to a focus now, if there's nothin' wrong about my figures, and I don't think there is. But it will have to be worked down to the fraction and then tapered off to the fineness of hair. It mustn't be allowed to spoil on our hands."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I must have a chat with my pards first, and—"

"Your pards? I thought there were only two of you."

"There are three of us on this case. We have a genuine detective in with us; but keep this mum."

"I will, I will. Oh, may you succeed, and bring the murderer of my boy to the fate he so richly deserves! The reward will be yours, promptly."

"Don't mention reward now," waived Billy. "We'll talk about that later. I will go now and talk with my pards, and then I'll come back here and let you into our plans."

In a short time he took his leave, and was soon at the hotel.

There he made known to Skinny and Ferret that he had something to say to them, and as soon as they could the three met for consultation.

Their conference lasted an hour, and when they parted company their plans of action were all laid. It was only necessary to put them into operation. They felt sure of their game.

Billy returned to Mr. Rentaway, and made a proposition to him which, at first, almost took away his breath.

When the scheme was outlined to him, however, he readily agreed to it, and from that hour the beginning of the end was marked.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FARDS GET THERE.

THE remainder of the afternoon was spent in seeming idleness.

Not a move was made that could excite the suspicion of the suspected Mexican, care being taken to that end.

When the Mexican went to his supper, how-

ever, then Broadway Billy and his thin partner disappeared, and were not seen again.

But not so the aged Mexican, the detective in disguise. He was on hand, and it was his business to see that Miguel Mendez did not get out of sight. No fear that he would.

It was just dark when there was a summons at the door of the Lodgelaw residence.

It was presently answered, by a woman servant, and into the dark hall filed three men, grim, determined fellows.

The last one to enter locked the door, placing his back against it, and there remained. The others promptly seized the woman, whose scream rung through the house.

Hasty steps were heard in the rear, a woman's voice demanded to know what was the matter, and the captured servant calling out that she was a prisoner, a door was heard to slam and the steps retreated.

In that direction sprang one of the men, leaving the servant in the hands of the other, but he was too late, or would have been.

The escaping person dashed to the other door, threw it open, and—was face to face with other determined captors.

"Don't be in a rush about it," cried out the well known voice of Broadway Billy. "It won't take you long to stay half an hour or so. You are our prisoner, my fine lady."

"Never!" the woman cried defiantly, and she wheeled to run back, but as she started she ran into the arms of the man who had pursued her.

"You see it is all up," spoke Billy, "so you may as well take it easy. We shall have your lovers here pretty soon."

"Why am I thus insulted, and in my own home?" the woman furiously demanded.

"No need to tell you," was the answer. "You know well enough."

When everything was secure, Broadway Billy retired out of sight for a moment and donned a hasty disguise.

That done, he left the house, and in a brief time was dogging the steps of Cleverdale Finck, the rascally insurance agent.

It was a little time later that Cleverdale Finck received a note in a woman's hand, it coming to him by a messenger who went speedily off as soon as it had been delivered.

Opening it, he found it to be from the woman, the Lodgelaw widow.

It was in excellent imitation of her hand, and it invited him to come to the house.

She had dismissed her servant, the note explained, and was alone. He was to come to the side entrance, precisely at nine, and enter without knocking.

It was about at the same time, too, that "Pablo Costo," at the hotel, received a similar message, with similar directions. The only difference was in the time when he was to come. The hour set for him was half-past nine.

At nine o'clock a man came down the street toward the residence, stopped for a few moments to make sure that no one was observing his movements, and then crossed, opened the gate and entered the yard, and going on, entered the house.

A minute later and Cleverdale Finck was a prisoner.

Half an hour passed, and the same was repeated. Another man came down to the corner, stopped for a considerable time, finally entering the yard and on into the house.

The moment the door closed behind him a light hand fell upon his arm, and a low voice whispered:

"You have come! How glad I am!"

He felt the skirts of a woman's dress touch him, and a hand took his in the dark and led him forward.

"Come right on," spoke the low, sweet voice. "I have something to show you; and then—then—"

The words were not supplied, but the break was full of enticing significance, and the man followed where he was led, unquestioningly.

A door was opened, and they entered a dark room. Forward then, carefully, until a something barred their further progress, when they stopped, and the voice once more spoke.

"Here, now, let me show you a surprise I have for you, Miguel. Look down at this table, and behold!"

The voice was in excellent imitation of that of the heartless widow, the Jezebel who had plotted and planned too far.

With the last word the light of a bull's-eye flashed forth, its light centered upon the thing against which Miguel Mendez was standing, and upon which he was gazing the instant it was visible.

With a scream of horror he sprang back, only

to find the supposed woman's hand closing upon him with a grip of steel, and a cold revolver against his head.

He had beheld not a table, but an open coffin! and in that coffin the body of the murdered Harry Rentaway!

It was more than his nerves could stand, and he trembled from head to foot.

"Miguel Mendez, murderer! you are my prisoner!"

So rung out the voice of Broadway Billy, and in the next moment handcuffs were on the fellow's wrists.

"I deny the charge," he faltered. "It is not so."

"We shall see about that," was the calm retort. "Let's see what you have in your pockets."

The first thing brought to light was a revolver, of the same size as that carried by Harrison Waldmar, and—one chamber of it was empty!

"First proof!" cried Billy. "There is no use your denying the charge, Miguel Mendez."

"But I do deny it!" was the now defiant retort. "That is not my name! I am Pablo Costo, and none other!"

"Liar!" cried a voice.

On the other side of the coffin stood the other prisoner, Finck.

At sight of him Mendez quailed. They were known to each other, and had been enemies.

The woman was brought in, the scene was lighted, and a goodly number of men were seen to be in the room; among them Barrington Rentaway.

Stepping forward to the murderer, and pointing at him with one hand and at the body of the murdered son with the other, he cried, in tones terribly sharp and vindictive:

"Miguel Mendez—dog! behold your work! You killed this man, my son, your second cousin, that you might have all the property of old Mendez to yourself. No use to deny it; we have the proof."

"It is a lie—a lie!" the rascal cried. "I did not kill your son! I defy you to prove it!"

At that moment one of the dead man's arms was lifted, and a finger pointed straight at the accused.

"The crime is yours!" said a sepulchral voice.

Miguel Mendez reeled back, his face ashy and his eyes staring.

"Take it away! take it away!" he cried.

"Confess!" said the same terrible voice.

"I do; I do!"

The rascal could stand no more, and turned his gaze another way.

The arm in the coffin was lowered, and a man came out from under the dread thing, the one who had lifted the arm and who had spoken the words.

It was the detective, Ferret, now without disguise, and at sight of him the insurance agent gave an exclamation of horror and despair. He had not looked for this. He saw that all was lost.

"What do you think of it now, Mr. Clever—but-not-quite-clever-enough?" demanded Broadway Billy. "You have put your foot into it bad, and you can't get it out again. It was a pretty scheme, but it didn't work."

"What do you mean?" was the curt demand.

"No need to try to get out of it, sir," put in the insurance detective. "We have you dead to rights this time."

No time was lost in forcing the confession from the lips of Miguel Mendez, and as he gave it, it was recorded by a man there for that purpose.

Mendez had come North from Mexico with the one intention of killing Harry Rentaway, who would have had an equal share in the Mendez estate. Miguel wanted it all, and took this means of getting it.

Unknown at Santa Fe, he thought he could go there under an assumed name, accomplish his purpose, and go away without any one ever suspecting him of the crime. It was a bold piece of work, but thanks to Broadway Billy and his pard it was balked.

The murderer had fired at Harry Rentaway from the hall door of the hotel as Harry was crossing the piazza, and had dodged back into the house immediately without being seen. When the victim of his bullet reeled into the bar-room, the assassin entered from a rear way.

No one had suspected him of the crime, and chances had been all in his favor for getting away. But the New York boys had played a sharp game, and had entrapped him neatly.

The prisoners were taken away and locked up, after the business of the hour had been finished,

the woman being one of them. She had tried to play the innocent victim, but the proof of her duplicity was not to be doubted.

The body of the murdered man was carried back to Mr. Rentaway's house, from where it was buried next day, the funeral being largely attended.

Harrison Waldmar had been released as speedily as possible, and was heartily congratulated by everybody.

He was still silent upon the mystery of the evidence that had placed him in danger.

The prisoners were given a hearing, which resulted in their being held for trial. Eventually Flinck and the wicked woman were sent to prison, and Mendez only escaped hanging by taking his own life.

It came out, later, that on the day of the murder Waldmar had fought a duel with a young man, one who had in some way spoken ill of his sister, and had wounded him severely. It was for his sister's sake that he had kept silent.

In due course of time he and Cora Wesselley were married, and when Barrington Rentaway made his will he left everything to their little son, who had been named Harry Rentaway.

But all this is of events that were of the future, taking date from the time of our story. Let us return.

Billy and Skinny were given the reward that had been offered—it was forced upon them.

They received also hearty thanks from the insurance detective.

This man's real name, by the way, was not A. Keene Ferret, but simply Smith—plain Smith.

Billy and his lean lieutenant spent only a day or two more at Santa Fe. They had photographs taken there, which they mailed home, together with lengthy letters, and finally took their leave, setting out northward, their final objective point being Denver.

They went on horseback, and the ride before them was a wild and long one. It was highly probable that they would have exciting adventures by the way, and, in any event, they would be weeks in the saddle. They knew not what lay before them; but one hint we may let fall: It was fortunate for Skinny that he had his photograph taken before setting out. Ere Billy reached Denver it was destined to be that Skinny would be the thin partner no more.

It was a bright morning when they rode out of the town, and a great crowd of people was out to see them off. They bade good-by to all, and amid cheers and good wishes, set their faces to the north and rode away.

The opening of our next story will discover the happy pards in the mountain wilderness, far from any camp, and in the desperate straits of adverse circumstances.

THE END.

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